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Old Zip's Cabin;

OR,

A Greenhorn in the Woods.

BY CAPT. J. F. C. ADAMS,
AUTHOR OF "OREGON SOL," "GLASS EYE," "NED
HAZEL," "NICK WHIFFLES'S PET," "THE
WHITE INDIAN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN AMATEUR MARKSMAN.

"ZIP told me that we were in a good game country, and that I must keep a good look-out, which is just what I've been doing for the last half hour. I only wish I could come across a genuine grizzly bear from the Rocky Mountains—that is if I could be certain of committing manslaughter against him—and be certain of my not injuring my clothes."

It was Percy Fitzsimmons who spoke thus, as he paused to rest from carrying the heavy rifle he had brought from the home of his uncle.

Percy was exquisitely dressed in the latest style, and was direct from Chestnut street, Philadelphia, which he had left several weeks, with the purpose of spending his vacation in the young, health-giving State of Minnesota. His uncle resided there, with his wife and daughter, Helena, a dashing, merry sprite, that during the last few years had grown up into one of the most charming and fascinating of women.

Fitzsimmons knew that he would be genuinely welcome at his uncle Hugh's—although their residence was pitched at a point dangerously elevated in latitude, when we state that the time of these incidents, that we are about to relate, was that awful summer of 1862, during the Sioux massacres in Minnesota.

Upon reaching his uncle's house, early in August, Percy Fitzsimmons was not a little disappointed to find that Helena was absent—gone on a visit to an acquaintance of hers, something like a hundred miles distant.

"That's rough—blamed rough," muttered the exquisite, as he listened to this intelligence, and carefully adjusted his eye-glasses upon his nose; "supposing her friend was lying at the point of death and she had sent for Helena, my cousin knew that I was liable to come at any time, so she ought to have waited, so as to be here to receive me."

However, she was gone,

and there didn't seem to be any remedy for it, as far as he was concerned.

"You can amuse yourself till she comes back," said the good-natured aunt Hannah, "in any way you choose; you wrote about shooting buffaloes and bears; I don't think you will be likely to find many of them about here, but there is an abundance of game in the woods there, and you're welcome to Hugh's rifle, if you wish to try your hand."

"By Jove! I guess I will!" exclaimed the delighted coxcomb, taking the gun in his hands, and endeavoring to manipulate it with the air of a veteran sportsman. "It's early in the morning, and I'll be back in time for dinner."

"Here, Percy," called Mrs. Fullerton, "you want the powder-flask and bullet-pouch."

"By Jove! I forgot that," exclaimed the visitor, as he paused long enough to make sure that he was fully prepared. As he was about to start off again, his aunt said:

"Zip Smith—a great hunter in these parts—was here about an hour ago, and told us there were fears of a rising of the Sioux, who have been seen lately in this neighborhood, so let me urge you not to wander too far away."

Percy promised to heed the warning thus given, and throwing his heavy gun over his shoulder, struck for the immense forest that was pointed out to him as the great roaming ground for all the magnificent game for which the great West is so celebrated.

The amateur sportsman followed a road, that seemed to have been used occasionally, for something like a mile, where he crossed through a lot of undergrowth, that covered a level piece of ground, and then found himself in the forest for which he had been so eagerly seeking.

Penetrating some distance into this, he found it of the wildest and most romantic character imaginable—seamed by ravines and chasms, and

abounding with rocky promontories, some of whose sides were perpendicular to a height of hundreds of feet, while the growth of vegetation and timber in some places made it absolutely impassable.

Picking his way with great care, so as to save his fashionable garments from injury, Percy finally paused in a portion of the wood more open than any he had yet seen, and leaned against a tall oak for the purpose of resting himself for a few minutes.

"Aunt Han. told me to look out for the Indians," he muttered, "and that's just what I've been doing and haven't seen one yet. Talk about grizzly bears, and buffaloes, and deer! I'd rather pop over one of the noble red-men than forty quadrupeds. What a prize it would be, and what an auspicious occasion for me, when I can promenade down Chestnut or Broad street with a real Indian scalp hanging as a charm to my watch-chain! How enviable Dick and George and the rest of the boys will feel, and what a sensation it will create, and then won't I be able to take the heiress, Miss Bell Livingston, from all of them!"

"I've got my penknife with me," he added, making sure that the article was in his pocket, "and after I tumble over the red-man, I can take my time and get off his scalp in a scientific manner. I once attended a course of lectures at the University, and am sure I know something about dissection."

While indulging in this soliloquy, Percy had replaced his eye-glasses upon his nose, and



FURTHER UTTERANCE WAS DROWNED IN THE BOISTEROUS LAUGHTER OF OLD ZIP.

peered around him to see whether there was any object in view upon which he might exercise his skill as a marksman. He had scarcely occupied a minute thus, when he started, and staring for another instant, dodged behind the tree-trunk against which he had been leaning.

"By Jove! if there ain't an Indian this very minute!" he gasped, trembling with agitation; "sitting on a log, too, as though he knew I was about and had given up all hope. Now, if he'll only sit still a few minutes longer, he's a gone case, sure!"

Carefully raising his rifle, Percy pressed it against the side of the tree, and sighted at the individual, who was sitting upon a fallen tree scarcely a hundred yards away, as motionless as if carved in stone, totally unmindful of the terrible danger in which he was placed.

It required considerable time for Fitzsimmons to get the "range" of the Indian, and the gun was so fearfully heavy, that he regretted not having brought a step-ladder with him, upon which to rest it, when about to fire. However, he finally got the thing in shape, and blazed away.

The instant it was fired, Percy dropped his piece, craned his neck forward, and peered in the direction of his game to see the result.

There sat the Indian stationary and unmoved, precisely in the position in which he had seen him at first.

"Killed so suddenly that he don't know what hurt him," whispered the marksman, with his eyes still fixed intently upon him. "I'll get my knife ready, while he topples over."

Percy opened his small pen-knife, and grasped it firmly, but when he was ready the Indian hadn't toppled a bit.

"That's strange," exclaimed the hunter, as he stealthily stooped down and picked up his gun. "I guess I'll try another shot, as it looks as though I've only wounded him, and it will be merciful to give him another to put him out of his misery."

As this was the first time he had ever loaded a gun, he consumed considerable time in so doing. Reasoning upon philosophical principles he managed at length to complete the process in a correct manner, and drawing back the hammer of his gun, he sighted with greater care at the immovable red-man that preserved his seat with such imperturbable gravity.

"That finished him, sure!" exclaimed Percy, the instant his gun was discharged, hurrying forward for the purpose of completing the performance with the scalping operation.

A rod or two separated him from his victim, when the latter turned his head, and demanded, in vigorous English:

"What in thunder you shootin' at?"

Percy paused in dismay, as he now recognized in the speaker a white man, dressed in the garb of a hunter, who rose to his feet, and looked savagely at him, while he waited for the answer to his question.

"I really beg pardon, but I took you for an Indian."

"And did you shoot at me?"

"I beg pardon—"

"That ain't answerin' me—I want to know did you shoot at me?"

"I must own that I did, but—"

Further utterance was drowned in the boisterous laughter of the hunter, who threw his head back, and placing his hands against his sides, laughed till he was scarcely able to stand.

"You are a mystery to me," said Percy, approaching closer as the laughter showed signs of subsidence. "If a man shot me twice, I don't think I'd feel much like laughing at him."

"Ef a man shot at yer, and the bullet went about a hundred yards over your head, I think you'd yell a little."

"But surely you are mistaken about that, for I know—"

"Dry up, fer you don't know nothin', ceptin' y'raps your name, an' whar you come from, an' who lost yer, an' what you're trying to do, which is what I axes yer."

Owing to the frightful peril in which Percy had first placed his interlocutor, he felt under great obligations to him, and gave the information asked, in a brief, but entirely satisfactory manner.

The hunter listened until he had finished, and then said:

"I've heard tell of you, down at Hugh's. He told me the other night that he was expectin' you from Philadelphia, and that you were a great hunter, come out here to have a little sport."

Percy stroked his fuzzy mustache, with an air of self-sufficiency, as he made answer:

"Uncle Hugh is a man of great penetration,

and I flatter myself that he did not misjudge me. I haven't my rifle with me, and you see I had to fire a couple of loads out of his, before I could get the hang of the blamed thing. May I ask your name?"

"Zip Smith."

Percy made a frantic leap forward, thrusting out his hand as he did so, exclaiming in a most gasping manner:

"Give us your hand on that!—you're the very man I'm looking for. Aunt Han, told me to look out for you, because you were so well acquainted with the woods hereabouts. I'm glad to meet you, and we'll hunt together for a week, sharing our game equally—"

"Not much," interrupted Zip, who was not without a waggish vein in his nature. "A man of your style and get up, don't need any one with him to bother him when he's goin' to shoot. Some of these days I'll take a little tramp with yer, but not to-day."

"Oh! it makes no difference to me," said Percy, very loftily. "I only mentioned it as a favor to you."

Zip now put on a serious expression, and spoke with the voice of a man in deadly earnest.

"I must tell you one thing, pardner, and that is that thar's danger in these parts of the very worst kind—"

"Glad to hear it," interrupted Percy; "that's what brought me here."

"And that's just what you'll want to get away from afore you've been here a week. I've hunted in Minnesota for twenty-five years, long afore thar war a single house whar St. Paul now stands, and I reckon I know somethin' about the Sioux and Crows, and I kin tell you thar's goin' to be the devil to pay hereabouts mighty soon. What I want to say to you, pardner, is to caution you ag'in' gittin' too fur into these woods, fur I've seen sign of the varmints sin' yesterday sun-up, and I'm mighty sorry that Hugh Fullerton druv his stakes so fur up this way, whar he's ten miles from the nearest settlement, 'cause it's my opine, he's got to dig out of these parts blamed soon, ef he and his wife expect to save thar ha'r. It's fortinit that the gal is down to the settlement now, whar they can't hurt her purty face, and I've sent word to her by young Ned Hosmer, that she must stay thar till the folks come down, though it's just like her not to do it, but to pitch fur her home so as to be with the old folks, when the thing comes. Howsumever, don't you stay long, or go fur into these woods, but dig for Hugh's purty soon."

And having delivered himself of this rather rambling speech, which certainly contained a good deal, the hunter Zip turned on his heel and disappeared in the wood.

Percy Fitzsimmons stood for a moment or two after his departure, digesting the information thus received.

"That chap seems to understand himself," he remarked, throwing up his head, as if addressing some person standing before him. "Of course he couldn't make much money in the dry-goods business in Chestnut street, but he's at home in the woods, and I don't suppose he often goes hungry."

"But it looks to me like presumption in him to keep giving me advice, as though I was a woman, and don't understand the rifle myself. True, I never practiced any thing but the pistol at the gallery at home, but the principle is the same in both cases, and I don't go home till I show them a specimen of my skill."

With this resolution he carefully reloaded his rifle, and throwing it over his shoulder, plunged into the thickest of the wood, casting furtive glances about him all the time in search of his game.

And this brings us back again to the opening of our story, where Percy paused for a moment and muttered:

"Zip told me that we were in a good game country and that I must keep a good look-out, which is just what I've been doing for the last half hour."

The ardent wish which the amateur felt of meeting with some royal game seemed destined to be gratified, as he had scarcely completed the soliloquy with which our story opened, when a crackling of the bushes, and a swaying of the undergrowth announced the approach of some animal, and, divining the direction whence it came, Percy sprang back and rested his rifle in the crotch of a sapling, the muzzle pointing directly toward the dangerous quarter.

"A grizzly bear. I know by his tread!" he whispered, in no little excitement; "he's my game, sure."

On came the brute, unconscious of his doom, until the outlines were discernible, as the bushes

began to separate in front, and quickening his aim from the fact that the animal was coming directly toward him, Percy made sure of hitting the head and pulled the trigger.

There was a frenzied bellow, and down went the creature on its knees, then over on its side, where it gave up the ghost, just as the panting Fitzsimmons dashed up to the spot.

"Confound it, if I haven't killed somebody's cow!" exclaimed the dismayed sportsman, looking hurriedly about him to see whether the indignant owner was anywhere in sight. "It's strange how I made such a mistake. I wonder whether she can be revived."

He stooped down and made an anxious "diagnosis," of the case, the result of which was the discovery that the bovine was stone dead, and consequently beyond the reach of medicine or surgery.

"And I'll bet a hat that the cow belongs to uncle Hugh," added the troubled Percy as he rose to his feet. "However I'll keep mum about it, and he'll think it was done by some of the Ravens, or Crows that Zip has been saying so much about."

There was some consolation in this thought, and bearing in mind the mistakes he had committed since starting out upon his hunt, Percy wisely resolved to use more caution in the matter.

"I'll let the next animal come a good deal closer, so that I can scrutinize it from head to tail before I fire. I've seen so many pictures of the bear and buffalo in Peterson's window on Chestnut street, that I am sure I can identify it without trouble."

As he pressed through the wood, and found himself traversing a broad, deep ravine, the warning of Zip came to him, and a suspicion troubled him that he was venturing too far into an entirely unknown piece of forest.

Still it was early in the day, and he was loth to return empty-handed, especially since his aunt had assured him of the abundance of game. He was quite desirous of establishing his reputation as a first-class marksman, and so he determined to press forward until something substantial rewarded his labor.

"I've heard tell of cow buffaloes," he said to himself, as he walked along, "and it may be after all that that was the creature I popped, but I guess I won't say any thing about it for the present."

A very prudent conclusion.

"Hello!"

This hasty exclamation was caused by the sight of a deer that dashed along, directly up the ravine, before him. There was no mistaking the identity of the animal, and, as soon as Percy had recovered from the shock caused by its rush, as it sped like an arrow up the ravine, he drew the heavy rifle to his shoulder, and let fly at the rapidly-vanishing game.

Whether the deer was struck or not can never be known; but, had one been watching it intently at the moment of firing, he would have discovered no change in its gait or manner, so that there is strong reason to decide against the accuracy of Percy's shooting.

"I once read somewhere, that when a hunter fires his gun, the first thing he does is to load again, and that's me."

Load he did, with a remarkable deliberation of movement, not stirring from his steps until the whole thing was completed.

Certain that the deer was mortally wounded, Fitzsimmons passed on up the ravine, as fast as possible, in the expectation of coming upon his body at every step; but, when he had gone fully a mile, making several serious rents in coat and pants, he began to feel somewhat skeptical, and came to another pause.

"I suppose the animal has crawled away or climbed up some tree to die by himself, and so there isn't any more use of looking for him."

After all the conviction began to creep over Percy that he would have to defer his Nimrod exploits until the afternoon, or until next day. Consulting his repeater, he found that it was past eleven o'clock, and that if he wished to reach his uncle's in time for the old-fashioned dinner-hour, he had not a moment to linger.

"There must be a shorter route homeward," he concluded, as he took several swallows from a flask that was drawn from an inside pocket, "and this seems to be it."

As he spoke, he struck into another ravine, that crossed nearly at right angles the one in which he stood, leading in the direction in which he judged the house of his uncle to be situated.

It is hardly necessary to state the result of such a proceeding as this. With no experience whatever in making his way through the forest

it followed as a moral necessity that he should go astray.

It was a long time before Percy became aware of this fact. The novice in wood-craft is always the most certain he is right, when he is the furthest wrong, and so he toiled confidently forward, only pausing to draw his snowy handkerchief across his forehead, and to rest himself from carrying the heavy rifle.

Twelve o'clock came and passed, and Fitzsimmons sat down on the face of a flat rock to take another draught and rest, with an unpleasant conviction stealing over him that he was astray.

He had hardly entertained this thought, when, raising his gaze, he was startled by what was certainly one of the most singular sights upon which any mortal had ever gazed.

CHAPTER II.

THE CABIN IN THE AIR.

THAT portion of the ravine, where Percy Fitzsimmons had halted, was several hundred yards in width, each side rising to a great height; on the left the rocks were as perpendicular as if laid in place by the hand of man. On the right, the masses of stone projected forward, as the top was approached, so that the ravine was a hundred feet wider at the bottom than at the top—so that if a venturesome man should crawl to the edge of the precipice and look over, his view would be as if he were gazing from the landing on a pair of stairs down the wider side.

All this was striking enough to arrest the attention of any one passing through the ravine below, excepting perhaps one who was as hungry, and anxious to get home, as was Percy; but it was not this which caused his start and gasp of wonder, as he adjusted his eye-glasses and looked upward.

On the lower side of this rocky, inclined wall, was suspended a cabin, resting apparently like Mahomet's, in mid-air. It was so far beneath the upper edge of the cliff, that a stone dropped from the top would not graze it, while it was elevated fully seventy-five feet above the ravine below.

Well might Percy Fitzsimmons forget his anxiety and hunger, in his wonder at this sight, for the question instantly rose in his mind:

"What is the meaning of this? Who built that cabin? And after it was built, how in the name of the seven wonders was it gotten up there? And what was it put there for? And who lives in it? And what keeps the babies from falling out, and how does a fellow get in there? Is it a burglar-proof structure that the inventor has brought out here to experiment upon, so that no one can steal his ideas?"

A hundred such questions as these went through the mind of the gaping Percy, as he stood in the ravine looking upward until his neck ached.

The cabin was very small, being not more than a dozen feet across, and a few feet greater in length.

It had a front and back door, and one window on each of the four sides—all being very narrow, and intended probably for outlooks more than anything else. The floor of the cabin was of heavy planking, and the roof was so steep, that no missile, if thrown upon it, would remain there an instant.

A close scrutiny of the flooring, by the aid of Percy's eye-glasses, gave him a suspicion that there was something like a door, opening either up or down, sufficient to admit the passage of a goodly-sized man.

The walls, bottom and roof of the cabin were made of planking, doubtless heavy enough to be proof against bullets fired from any direction, and each window was provided with two long, narrow panes of glass.

"That looks so queer that I'll lay down on my back, and take another survey of it, without twisting my neck off."

After Percy had viewed it in this manner, in silent amazement, for perhaps fifteen minutes, his thoughts found expression in words:

"Now, if that cabin is there, it has been put there for some purpose, and there must be somebody living there. I shouldn't wonder if there was some enchanting young lady imprisoned in there, like the wife of Bluebeard, and that she is waiting for me to come and rescue her. I wonder if I can draw her attention."

Filled with this brilliant idea, the exquisite hastily resumed the sitting position, and drawing forth his handkerchief, almost blew off the end of his nose in his effort to signal the fair one above.

All the time he was thus occupied, he kept one eye cocked upward on the look-out for the returning signal; but failing to see any, he took

the linen in hand, and swayed it over his head, as though he were on the point of bursting into a "hip! hip! hurrah!"

This was continued several minutes, but the suspended cabin gave no sign; all remained as silent as the tomb—no face or answering handkerchief appeared at the window—and Percy began to fear that his attentions were all in vain.

At this juncture, Percy noticed that the cabin was without anything corresponding to a chimney, and he gave up his observation in disgust.

"I suppose, maybe, the family that live there have gone to Saratoga or Newport to spend the summer, and so there is no use of a fellow sending up his card. Hello, up there!"

But this hail was equally fruitless of response, and Percy walked directly under the structure and looked up at it.

"I've a great notion to fire a bullet into it, and see if they wouldn't answer that, but then if there's a lovely maiden there, it might shock her."

As there seemed no probability of learning anything more about this curious contrivance, and as Fitzsimmons began to realize again that he was somewhat a-hungered, he moved on up the ravine on his return homeward.

"I wonder if uncle Hugh knows anything about that; I'll ask him if I ever find my way out of this blamed place, and get where there's something to eat. By Jove! but the kitchen smelled good when I left."

When Percy had gone by the hanging cabin for a considerable distance, he naturally looked back to see whether it had taken any new phase upon itself.

There it hung, seeming to project from the face of the rocks, like a knot or excrescence growing upon the side of a tree, and without any visible means of support.

Furthermore, a man, most probably the owner, was making his way into it. Something like a rope seemed to be fastened around his body, or else he was sitting in a loop made by it, and he was ascending.

And that too without any effort of his own. Some power was drawing him steadily and quite rapidly upward; and Fitzsimmons watched until he was directly beneath and against the floor of the cabin, when the trap-door seemed to open, and the man disappeared as if he had made a plunge into the sea, with the waters instantly closing over and burying him out of sight.

"I must get somebody to introduce me to that chap," concluded Percy, as he resumed his walk homeward. "I should like to have the construction of that edifice explained. I think the diagram of that building would make my fortune as an architect, but just now I should like most deucedly to get something to eat. Here it is two o'clock and dinner is getting cold to a dead certainty."

Unexpected good-fortune attended the persevering labors of Percy Fitzsimmons in making his way out of the wood. He knew that he was lost, but in taking the cross-ravine, he had selected the very one that speedily led him out of the mountainous forest, into the very underbrush through which he had passed on entering it.

"By Jove! but that is lucky," he exclaimed, in delight. "Now I've got but a short distance to the road, and then it's all plain sailing to uncle Hugh's. The old fellow will think it rather queer that I was so anxious to be off on a hunt that I couldn't wait till he came in from the field. However, I'll make it all right with him."

It was a warm day in August, and both shoulders and both arms of Percy ached from carrying the heavy rifle of his uncle; but he was ravenously hungry, and walked rapidly down the road with an energy altogether unnatural to him.

"Just let me throw myself outside of one of aunt Han's anti-dyspeptic dinners, and then I'll lay off all the afternoon, smoke my cigar, and read till I drop to sleep."

And at the vision his fancy painted, he hastened his footsteps, looking continually for a sight of his welcome goal.

"Hello! there she is!" he suddenly exclaimed, as he caught sight of the substantial structure, whose windows and roof looked particularly inviting, as seen across a field of waving corn. "That's the oasis in the desert! that's the Continental! that's Atlantic City and Cape May, all boiled into one—that is the rising sun to the ship-wrecked mariner."

As Percy approached the house, he was a little annoyed to see no one about the building or in the yard.

"They have been waiting dinner, I suppose," he concluded, as he stepped within the gate, "so I am in good time after all."

But before he placed his hand upon the latch of the door, a vague fear crept over him at the unwonted stillness of the place, and unconsciously he moderated his steps and walked lightly, as we do when nearing the room in which a dead friend is lying.

Percy had raised his hand to lift the latch, when his eye rested upon a sheet of paper, hastily folded and lying upon the sill, with his name in pencil in the large, bold, angular characters of a farmer.

Hastily picking it up, he read:

"MY DEAR NEPHEW:

"Don't remain at the house one minute after receiving this warning! Old Zip was here but a few minutes ago, with the news that a party of Sioux Indians are making for this point, with the intention no doubt of massacring us all. He providentially discovered them a few minutes after meeting with you. I wished to remain, so as to take you away with us, but he would not permit that, as it would insure the destruction of us all, and he thought it probable that we should find you in the wood. If we do not, Zip will return for you, as soon as we find a place of refuge. In case you return to our doomed house, do not wait a moment after reading this hastily scrawled note, but make all haste for the wood, where you were hunting, and we will manage to find you."

YOUR UNCLE HUGH."

This was astounding tidings indeed, and Percy Fitzsimmons stood for a moment like one paralyzed.

Then, dropping the paper to the ground, he glanced furtively about him, in the expectation of seeing the dreaded red-skins rushing from the wood upon him; but the same oppressive stillness rested upon nature, as though no human being had ever broken in upon this primeval solitude.

"I ought to travel, that's certain," he whispered, still listening; "but I'm blessed if I like to take to the woods again as hungry as I am. I think I've got time to swallow a mouthful or two."

Having resolved on this, he opened the door, which had been purposely left unfastened by Hugh Fullerton, and entered.

The house of the farmer was similar to many that are still found on the Minnesota frontier, being of moderate size, made of boards, with some resemblance to the building generally known as the "cottage," and quite attractive in the interior as well as the exterior arrangements.

Great as was the hurry in which Fullerton and his wife had taken their departure, the housewife had gained time to "tidy up" somewhat, so that there was an appearance of neatness extremely attractive.

But Percy Fitzsimmons was looking for something to eat, and seeing there was none in the room, he made a dive for the cellar, where he was certain of finding it in abundance.

"Suppose they took it all away with them!" he gasped, in horror, as he paused for an instant in descending the stairs.

He speedily reached the dimly-lighted and cool apartment, and the first thing that struck his eye was one of aunt Han's snowy loaves of bread, with a plate of golden butter sitting beside it.

Dashing back again up-stairs, the delighted Percy speedily procured a dinner-knife and returned.

"By Jove! but that pays a fellow," as he caught up the loaf and sliced off a huge piece, upon which the fragrant butter was recklessly dashed.

"How much better that that should be eaten by a Christian than by a barbarian," he muttered, as he devoured the stuff with a most ravenous appetite. "Hello! there is some meat and pudding."

Indeed Percy was enjoying himself exquisitely. Hunger is said to be the best sauce, and never had the gentleman relished the choicest viands at the suppers of his club, as he did this homely diet, prepared by the farmer's wife in Minnesota.

In the zest of his enjoyment all thought of the Indians was forgotten for the time, and Percy ate like one who was doing it under contract.

In the midst of his feast he had a narrow escape from a fearful death. As he sat down upon an inverted tub and devoured his bread and butter, his eyes kept wandering about the apartment, when they suddenly rested on something white, that lay in an open paper upon a small side-shelf.

"That's sugar, by Jove!" exclaimed Percy, springing up, "and I've always had a weakness for that."

Taking down the paper, he was about to sprinkle it upon his butter, when he chanced to glance at the label, which was "Poison."

"Whew!" gasped the exquisite, aghast, "that is cutting a little closer than is comfortable."

Yielding to a singular impulse, for which it was hard to account, Fitzsimmons carefully tied up the poison in the paper, and placed it in his coat pocket.

"I ain't exactly clear what I'm going to do with that, but perhaps I may have an opportunity of varying the diet of the noble red-man therewith, if he gets troublesome."

By this time Percy had pretty well satisfied the pangs of hunger, and drawing an immense sigh of enjoyment, he muttered:

"Aunt Han. knows how to make bread and to churn butter—though I'm fearfully afraid I've squelched the original churn—and I only wish I could carry away this supply. I don't think it will do to roll that butter and put it in my pocket, as it is a little warmer outside than it is here, but I'll take a slice or two of bread."

This he managed to stow away about his person, without inconvenience, and feeling that he had thoroughly gorged himself not only with the bread, but with a pan of cold, creamy milk, he rose from his seat to leave.

"By Jove! I am afraid that I have staid too long, but when a hungry fellow gets under full headway, it is hard to put down the brakes—"

A chill of terror passed through the young man, as he heard distinctly the latch of the upper door lifted, and instantly thereafter a foot-step upon the floor above his head.

"Indians!" was the thought that came to his mind, as he shrank shivering in the corner, "and I've no way to get out of this muss."

The only means of egress was by going upstairs, as the two windows that admitted the light were barred and very diminutive in size.

So Percy grasped his gun and tremblingly awaited the issue of events.

The faint hope that perhaps his friends had returned, was quickly dissipated by the sound of shuffling feet above, and several deep bass ejaculations that could only come from the throat of an Indian.

They were in the room above, and the situation of Percy Fitzsimmons could not well have been more painful. He had no doubt that the building would be burned, so that if, by any possibility, his hiding-place was not discovered, he was certain of the other terrible alternative.

"Confound them!" muttered the poor fellow, "this is a little the worst scrape I was ever in in all my life—"

Terror accumulated upon terror, for now he heard the latch of the door, leading to the cellar, lifted, as if some one were about to descend to tomahawk him.

Percy shrunk back in the furthest corner, only praying that he had the ability to force himself into the solid wall behind him, while he fixed his eyes upon the top of the stairs, his heart throbbing painfully.

Who shall depict his feelings when a huge moccasin came to view, as it was placed upon the first step, then the other sunk heavily upon the other step, displaying the ankles and leggings of what was certainly a stalwart Indian?

Yes; one of the Sioux was on the point of extending his explorations to the cellar, and there seemed scarcely one thousandth of a chance of avoiding detection.

The feet and legs were followed by the body, and then the head of a magnificently-formed Sioux warrior, who, reaching the floor, stood motionless for a moment, while he looked curiously about the cellar.

This, as we have remarked in another place, was dimly lighted, and coming from the bright sunshine above, it may have been that he saw objects only indistinctly; for, although his eyes seemed to light upon the shivering Fitzsimmons more than once, yet they passed on, as though they saw him not.

The eye of the aboriginal next rested upon the shelf upon which the edibles reposed, and with a pig-like grunt he stepped rather hastily forward and reached his hand up, as though he too was not insensible to the pangs of hunger.

"Oh, why—oh, why didn't I spread some arsenic upon a piece of bread and bait that old rat?" was the remorseful thought that crossed the mind of the trembling Fitzsimmons; "that would have been an unexceptionable way of disposing of his claims."

But the Sioux did not manifest any desire to eat. He merely glanced at the crumbs, the milked butter and exhausted milk-pan, and probably concluded that some one "had been there."

Then he paused and stood absolutely motionless for full a minute, as if listening to the sub-

dued moving of feet and murmuring of voices over his head.

And standing thus, directly in front of Fitzsimmons, he was a picture to behold.

He must have been fully six feet and a half in height, of matchless proportion and symmetry.

He was as straight as an arrow, wearing the breech-cloth, and naked from his waist up. His swelling, billowy chest, was without a mark of paint or tattoo, and the roll and play of muscles was a sight of themselves. His right wrist was incased by a band of wampum, while no other ornament was visible upon any part of his person.

As he stood, the weight of his body rested upon his right leg, the left being slightly bent at the knee, with the foot thrown a few inches in front of the other. From the girdle at his waist, projected the handles of two knives, his left hand resting idly upon one of these, while his right was lifted and resting upon the shelf above and in front of him.

These two knives constituted the entire armament he had in his possession at this moment, his tomahawk and rifle doubtless having being left above.

He was without any blanket, and without the proverbial top-knot of the red-skin, his long, black, wiry hair falling in all its luxuriance down his back to his waist, and totally devoid of any sort of ornament.

His position was such that his profile was shown to the fullest advantage, and the Roman nose and stern visage would have graced the face of one of the warriors of Anakim.

All this, I say, was admirable in a certain sense, but it can not be said that Fitzsimmons was specially affected in that way. He thought that that particular pose was becoming monotonous, and he would have much more admired a vanishing view of the red-skin, as he ascended the stairs.

One full minute is a long time to any one in suspense, and it seemed of interminable length to the cowering fugitive, but finally the savage turned about, as if to move away, and the heart of Percy fluttered with his new-born hope.

"He's going at last."

So he was, but he was "going for the white man" in the corner, who, before he could realize what was up, found himself confronted by the terrible being, who demanded, in a voice of the gruffest thunder:

"Hoo-wah-hoo—come—ah—wo—me catch-me scalp—"

"I surrender," replied the terrified Fitzsimmons, never once thinking of his gun or pistol, in the way of defense against his ferocious foe.

CHAPTER III.

THE ARROW'S MESSAGE.

AFTER his separation from Fitzsimmons, old Zip continued his way for a short distance through the woods, all the time ascending a very steep incline until he had reached one of the most elevated portions of this precipitous country.

Here, on the summit, grew several trees, the tallest of which the hunter instantly climbed, with the agility of a monkey, pausing only when the highest branch bent beneath his weight.

From his elevated, tower-like position he gained an extensive view of the surrounding country in every direction. His eagle eye swept the horizon, like the sailor at the mast-head; and, in less than one minute after taking this view, he made the alarming discovery which we have already intimated.

Not more than a mile to the westward, he saw a party of Sioux Indians, standing together, on a slightly elevated hill, their appearance and manner showing that they were engaged in discussing some subject in which all were deeply interested.

Although they had horses, every red-skin, excepting one solitary warrior, was standing on the ground, their docile horses cropping the grass which grew very luxuriantly about them.

At that distance it was impossible for the keen-witted hunter to form more than a suspicion of what the dismounted Indians were discussing; but the Indian seated upon his horse was the unerring index of their intentions. His brawny arm, as it was raised, was pointed toward the large hill, beyond which nestled the home of Hugh Fullerton.

It was plain, from the position of the Sioux, and the intervening obstacles, that they could not see the building, although well aware of its location.

But the danger was imminent in the extreme, and three minutes' observation was amply sufficient for Old Zip, who slid down the tree as

though it had been greased expressly for the occasion.

"The devils are going for Hugh, that's sartin, and I've got to do some tall travelin' to head 'em off."

The necessary "tall traveling" was done, the hunter rushing through the wood and undergrowth like a terrified deer. Striking the road by the shortest route, he went tearing down it with the speed of a race-horse.

Fortunately, Hugh Fullerton was at the house, with his wife Hannah, who instantly and hastily collected her silver-ware and most-easily-carried valuables together, while her husband, after a few earnest words with the hunter, indited the note, which was read in vain by Percy Fitzsimmons.

It was decided not to fasten the doors or windows, or to make any attempt to baffle the Sioux, as all such labor would be useless, and occasion only the loss of most precious time.

The two cows were grazing in the undergrowth—excepting the one that had run against the bullet of Fitzsimmons—and the same number of horses were standing in the shade of a tree, at the corner of a field, munching their dinner.

Ten minutes from the time the thoroughly-frightened Zip made his appearance in front of the cottage, the three hastily left, Mrs. Fullerton bearing a small bundle in one hand, her husband carrying a pack also in one hand, and his remaining rifle in the other.

"Percy has my ammunition," said he, "but I reckon you have enough for us both, Zip."

"You bet," was the significant reply.

As every moment was fraught with danger, Zip turned sharply around the corner of the house and plunged into the field of corn, the stalks of which were high enough to afford them concealment, while making their way to the woods lying beyond.

Across this they went almost at a run, and reaching the opposite side, were confronted by a small, open space, across which it was necessary to pass in order to reach the woods lying beyond.

Here they paused, and Zip made a reconnaissance lasting several minutes. He reported that nothing was to be seen of the Indians, although there could be no doubt that they were close at hand.

"Follow me," he said, as he started on a run for the woods, and they obeyed him so well that when he dashed into cover, they were scarcely behind him.

This protection reached, something like a feeling of security came over the couple, for they knew there were strange caverns and recesses among these hills, known to no human being besides Old Zip, and in which they were confident he could place them in secure hiding until the danger passed.

"How thankful I am that Helena is at Alden," exclaimed the mother, "where she cannot be molested by this peril."

"Yes, and Zip has sent Ned Hosmer down there to warn her of her danger and to tell her not to come, so that much is insured against."

Exchanging words in this manner, the two walked along at a less rapid pace, until they had advanced a considerable distance along the ravine, to which we have already referred, in our narrative of Percy Fitzsimmons.

"I am anxious about Percy," said the farmer, addressing the hunter.

"Who's Percy?"

"My nephew."

"Oh—that chap you call Persimmons. You needn't fret about him, for the way he was trampin' through the woods and over the rocks, I don't think he'll ever be able to find the way out again. Howsumever, after we go to roost, I'll rake up the hills for him."

The "cabin in the air," as our reader has suspected, was the residence of Old Zip, although how and why it was built, and what was the secret of its curious suspension, he refused to reveal to any one, except his wife, who, sharing the structure with him, was equally reticent in all that concerned it.

The place had been visited by the Fullertons, so that when they came in sight of it, no wonder was expressed, and only the question asked:

"Are you sure Peggy is there?"

"Look, and see for yourself."

As he spoke, the pleased trapper pointed up at the nearest window, at which the broad, cheery and bronzed face of a woman in middle life appeared.

It required but a moment for her to identify the approaching party, and then a trap-door in the floor of her cottage was seen rapidly descending. When it reached the ground, it was

seen to hold a rather ingeniously constructed "chair bottom," made by the crossing and interlacing of the rope itself.

"I'll go up first," said Zip, "so as to help tote you up."

Taking his seat, he began ascending, and in due time vanished through the dark, cavern-like opening in the base of the cabin.

Instantly it came down again, and Mrs. Fullerton went up, followed by her husband, when the rope was drawn in and the trap-door closed.

There were now four human beings collected in the "cabin in the air," and with far more comfort than would be imagined. Peggy, the wife of the hunter Zip, resembled him in many respects, being strong of limb, plain-featured, plain-spoken, and as courageous as a lion.

This curious building contained four rooms, none of which, of course, were of any extensive dimensions, but they answered their purpose admirably well.

The "front room" or "parlor" was the most in use, as being the one in which Old Zip sat and smoked his pipe, while his wife worked at his elbow. Back of this was a smaller room, lit by a single window, containing a cleverly-made and smoothly-working windlass, by which any one within could fish up a friend from the solid ground below.

This, in cases of emergency, could be used as a bedroom, which was the purpose of the two rooms overhead.

Every thing was arranged to the best advantage, and yet three or four occupants by no means could avoid being greatly cramped. The furniture of the place consisted of a few blankets and two solitary chairs, without any cooking utensils or any arrangements for kindling a fire, all of which, will be understood, when I state that this was only a temporary home of Zip and Peggy, to which they repaired in cases of danger, and when the clouds were scattered, returned again to their nesting-place, somewhere among the caverns and hills, and to which they were never known to invite any visitors.

Zip took pains to keep a supply of dried meat and water on hand, and it was plain that no matter who constructed and suspended the curious building, it was done with the purpose of offering shelter against the ferocious red-skins—just as it was doing on the present occasion.

Peggy greeted her visitors quite warmly, and made them as welcome as possible, Zip explaining, in a few words, the circumstances that had compelled this hasty visit.

"Hain't you see'd nothin' Peg?" he asked. "Haven't any of the varmints been see'd yerabouts?"

"No—nothing, only some little whippersnapper stretched out on the ground down there, who began shaking his handkerchief at me. I got so provoked that I was going just down to cuff his ears, when he got up and went off."

"That was Persimmons," exclaimed Zip; "he ain't fur off, you may be sartin."

"Do you expect the Indians to follow us here?" inquired Mr. Fullerton of the hunter.

"Very likely, as they've done the same thing afore, and know where we hang out."

"And you feel no alarm about them coming?"

Zip Smith indulged in a quiet grin before he replied.

"This thing has been through too much of that kind of business. If we run short of bullets, we can pick out enough lead in the planks to last us, and if they can get at us, all I've got to say is, let 'em get, and see what they can make of it."

"Suppose they should lay regular siege to us?"

"Let 'em siege."

The assurance with which the hunter spoke was not without its effect upon his listeners, who, knowing his experience on the frontier, pinned no little faith to his utterances.

"I feel much relieved by your words," said Hugh, after a moment's pause, "for I can not deny your superior knowledge to mine—but it is hard for me to rid myself of a feeling of uneasiness, when I enter this nest on the face of the rock. I have not examined the means by which it is held in place, but we are perched so high above the earth—that I do feel nervous—and expect I shall—so long as I remain here."

The imperturbable Zip smiled in his huge way again, saying:

"I've had ten men crowded in yer at the same time—and on a dark night, when the wind, and snow, and hail was a-comin' up this gulch most everlastingly—when every thing outside was as dark as a wolf's mouth, and the

hail-stones rattled against the plank, like so many bullets."

"That would have been a purty time for all of us to have gone to everlasting smash, wouldn't it? And some of them chaps did feel a little shaky, when this old thing swung back and forth, like the top of a pine in a hurricane."

"How long ago was that?"

"Full a dozen years, when thar wa'n't a white man in these parts, 'cept them as come arter beaver-skins. Every mother's son that I had was a trapper, and I kept 'em thar fur two days and nights, with the red-skins howling below like a pack o' prairie wolves, and a-blasting away at us—while we peppered back ag'in."

"Did you lose any of your men?"

"Not a hair of thar head was hurt—and when the varmints got disgusted and left, we all come down ag'in and cleared out."

"That certainly was a fair test of your cabin."

"Oh! she's thar every time," said the hunter, warming up with pride, at the remembrance of the past. "Many and many is the time that Peggy has hauled me up this yer rope, with the night as black as pitch, and forty red imps yelping through the gulch for me. But didn't the old woman everlastingly turn the coffee-mill, when I give her the sig? I tell yer she made things hum—she did."

"Has any attempt ever been made to fire it?" inquired Fullerton.

"Something less than a hundred; they've fired their blazing arrers into it, but I've laid back, smoked my pipe, and laughed."

"But this wood has been so long exposed to the air, that it certainly must be seasoned so as to be combustible."

"So I s'pose—but the planks are too heavy and solid to take fire from any thing less than a pile of blazing brush; but you see, when they send an arrer into it, the weapon burns a minute or so, and then drops to the ground, and the little twist of fire goes out. Now, if they could drop a lot of brush on the roof, and make it stay there for an hour or so, they might do something—but that can't be did, and so where are you?"

While this fragmentary conversation was going on, Peggy, the wife of Old Zip, was looking out the narrow window, with such an apparent interest as to attract the attention of her husband.

"What is it, old woman? Do you see any thing of the varmints?"

"No; but there is somebody down in the ravine, that is trying to attract our notice."

"Look out fur Injun devilments."

"It isn't red-skin," said Peggy, without removing her gaze. Then she exclaimed, with a smile: "Why, I thought I knew him; it is Ned Hosmer, sure enough."

Zip sprang to her side, and looked out.

"Yes; it's Ned, and he's got some word to send us."

"Is Helena with him?" asked Mrs. Fullerton, in no little excitement.

"I don't see her," replied the hunter; "but I s'pose he's keeping her in the background till he can send us some word."

"How will he do that?"

"He has a bow and arrow; I'll raise the window, and then he'll send his message into the house, and save time."

Zip raised the window, looked out a moment at his young friend, waving his hand as a signal that all was right, and then stepped back out of the way and waited.

A moment later there was a *whiz* and *thud*, and an arrow was seen sticking in the planks on the opposite side of the room, with a bit of paper fluttering from the head.

Both Zip Smith and his wife were able to read and write, and reaching up, the hunter drew the missile from the plank where it was sticking, untwisted the paper, and read it.

As he did so, the eyes of the rest of the party were fastened upon him, and they saw him flush and start, like one who receives startling tidings.

He held the paper for several minutes, looking steadily at the letters traced upon it, as if debating whether to make known their meaning. Finally he passed it over to his wife, without a word, as if he had decided to leave it to her better judgment.

With a mother's intuition, Mrs. Fullerton knew at once that the message concerned the fate of her only child, and she said, or rather entreated:

"Tell me, Zip, what it is. It regards Helena; I know it; do not trifle with my feelings. Is she dead?"

He shook his head in the negative.

"Is she in the hands of the Sioux?"

The same answer was made to this.

By this time, Peggy had read the note, and she interposed.

"It does concern Helena, and is enough to worry any mother. Listen while I read it. It is addressed to Zip, and says:

"Upon reaching Alden, I found that Helena had left there early this morning for home. I hastened back again, followed her trail, until she left the route and took to the woods, when I lost it. I visited your house a short time ago, but found a party of Sioux just leaving it, with a young man—a stranger to me—as prisoner. They had not Helena with them, so I hope that she is securely sheltered with you. Let me know whether I am mistaken or not. "Nep."

This was alarming news indeed, and occasioned the most painful apprehension upon the part of the parents.

"May I speak a few words with him?" asked Hugh, walking toward the window.

"We'll fetch him up here," replied Zip, stepping into the rear apartment, jerking up the trap-door, and letting the rope run down to the ground.

By the time it was within reach, it was grasped by the young man, who was hastily drawn upward, and the door again closed after him.

Ned Hosmer was not a roving hunter, as the reader may suppose from the references made to him, although he rather prided himself upon his claim to that title. He was engaged in mercantile pursuits in Saint Paul, but spent his vacation every summer in hunting through the upper portion of the State, visiting this section at other times, as opportunity presented itself.

All who knew him, understood that great as were the attractions of the chase, they were far surpassed by those of Helena Fullerton, whose bright eyes, rosy countenance, and musical voice, would have charmed the heart of any one of the sterner sex, and whose amiability of character made her one of the most loving of daughters and delightful companions.

As Hosmer was introduced into the anxious circle, gathered in the cabin in the air, he courteously saluted all, and looked about with no little curiosity.

"Is she here?" he asked in a whisper, looking inquiringly around.

"We do not know where she is," replied the mother, in a sad tone; "we supposed she was in Alden, where she would remain until this trouble was over."

"So I hoped," returned Hosmer; "but her friends said that she took a sudden resolution yesterday to come home, and would not be dissuaded."

"Do you think she knew of this danger?" inquired her father.

"All knew of the impending outbreak among the Sioux, but her friends did not know that the danger was so close at hand. I think, however, that she learned it, by some means or other, and it was her anxiety on account of her parents that hastened her return."

"I have no doubt that such was the case," said Mrs. Fullerton, placing her apron to her eyes and giving way to her sorrow; "to warn us of peril, she has risked her own life."

"But where can she be at this moment?" asked the father, pursuing the subject with an eager intensity that was almost painful to the others.

"That is hard to tell; had I known where to find her, you may be assured that I would not have been here."

"I think she is hiding in the woods somewhere," said Zip; "that 'ere gal is a sharp 'un, and she hain't gone blind, but has kept her eyes about her. She has found there was a rumour up afore she got to the house, and has steered clear of it. She is only waiting to see whether her father and mother are in the hands of the varmints, and as long as she is unsartin about it, she'll do the best to keep out of the way, but if she should become convinced that the Sioux hed 'em, she'd go right among 'em and give herself up. That's that gal, you kin bet."

"Yes," said the mother, rallying for the moment; "that is just what our darling will do, but what will become of her, alone in the woods? She has already been there for hours, and how can she keep out of their hands?"

"She ain't in the best place she could be in world, that's sartin," said Zip, as if speaking to himself; "and it won't do to leave the gal to take care of herself; so, Ned, you and me, I think, will have to make a hunt for her."

"My wish exactly, and let us be off at once."

"First, we'll take a look to see if the coast is clear, as the sailors say."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ATTACK UPON THE CABIN.

NED HOSMER stood for a few moments in conversation with Hugh Fullerton and his wife, while the hunter made his observations from the room window, endeavoring to inspire hope in their hearts, regarding their child.

He was attired in a huntsman's suit, having started on a campaign that was intended to embrace several weeks, although when hunting in the vicinity of Helena Fullerton's home, it may be surmised that it would require the intervention of something extraordinary to compel him to spend many of his nights in the woods.

He was of an erect, manly figure, about four-and-twenty years of age, with dark, neatly-trimmed beard, nose slightly Roman, with handsome features, and a most winning address. Just the one calculated to win the way to a maiden's affections, it remained for him to encounter, unmoved, all the fair ones of his own city, and then to lose his own heart away up in Northern Minnesota—as lose it he actually did.

Zip Smith remaining several minutes at the window, Ned finally asked:

"What's up? Any thing wrong?"

"Confound it!" muttered the hunter, impatiently, "we're just too late."

"Why?"

"There are about a dozen of the varmints coming up the ravine."

"Can't we slip down in time enough to get out the other way?"

"We might if there wasn't a bigger party coming down on us from that way."

"Then we must wait until they go away."

"That's it, but there's no telling when they'll do that; they may hang around for two or three days."

"And then what will become of Helena?" asked the despairing mother.

"So long as we can keep the Sioux here, so much greater will be the chances of her safety," said Hosmer, in his soothing voice; "so it will be a direct benefit to her."

"But will she not perish, wandering in the woods?"

"No fear of that," was the cheery response. "I am in hopes that when she discovers the condition of things, she will turn about and retrace her steps to Alden."

"I hope so; but I fear not."

Ned now ventured to make an observation for himself. He saw, as Zip had said, something like a dozen Indians approaching, all on foot, walking promiscuously, but with care, while their upturned faces and gestures proved that the suspended cabin was the great object of interest to them.

Looking in the opposite direction, almost the same sight presented itself, except that the party of red-skins was a little larger, and they were somewhat closer.

"Do you see any thing of Percy among them?" inquired Hugh.

"Who is Percy?" was the reply of Hosmer.

"He is my nephew, who reached here to-day, and was absent on a hunt, when we were compelled to flee from the house."

"Oh! I have heard Helena speak of him. He must have been the young man I saw in their possession when they were leaving the house. I will look again."

Every member of the approaching parties was carefully scrutinized by Ned Hosmer, who added:

"There isn't a white man among them; both companies are made up exclusively of Sioux warriors armed to the teeth."

"Then Percy must have made his escape," said Hugh. "I am rejoiced to learn that. Don't you think he has gotten away from them?"

"Perhaps so," replied the young hunter, who thought the probabilities ten times as great that the unfortunate fellow had been brained by the merciless red-skins, within fifteen minutes of his capture.

By this time the Indians were within a hundred yards or so, and Hosmer and Zip, who were watching from opposite windows, concluded it best to withdraw their faces, as these same red-skins had a dangerous way of bringing their rifles to their shoulders, and firing with lightning-like quickness.

The old hunter cautioned Mrs. Fullerton to keep away from the windows, the sashes of which were raised, while he and the other two men knelt down on the floor, and held the muzzles of their rifles thrust partly through the loop-holes, so that they could look and fire upon their foes as occasion might warrant.

Keeping their gaze upon the red-skins, they saw the two parties meet in the ravine and con-
sult together. They took care, however, to

minge together in front of, instead of directly under, the cabin, as though they were fearful the contrivance might drop down upon their heads.

"Don't fire at 'em till I give the word," said Old Zip, in an undertone; "guess you'd better wait till I pop one of 'em over."

"Perhaps," suggested the pale mother, "if you don't injure any of them, they may be more tender to Helena and Percy."

"Get out," was the contemptuous reply of Zip, who understood "Injun nature" too well to be deceived by such appeals; "them varmints have got thar blood up, and nothing but lead and steel will cool 'em off. If I should go down thar and present each of them skunks with a hoss, rifle, blankets, powder, beads, knives, and five hundred thousand dollars in gold, each would turn round and skulp me, afore I could tell 'em they war welcome; that's Injun, blast him," added Zip, moving his rifle in a stealthy manner, as though he were seeking to keep some one in range; "and when they're on the war-path they're worse than so many rattle-snakes."

A careful look at the body of red-skins assembled in the ravine would have justified the blunt-spoken hunter, for more downright hideousness perhaps was never congregated in a party of red-skins numbering less than fifty.

Many of the Sioux are splendid specimens of physical manhood and vigor, and when in war-paint, although terrible to look upon, are not without a certain beauty; but some of the party were dwarfed, with long, filthy hair hanging down their backs, like the tail of a horse—some had their hair colored red and green, while their faces were ringed and streaked and daubed, with ochre and clay, until they looked like veritable imps themselves. Quite a number had ragged blankets hanging over their shoulders, and there was an appearance of filth about them all that made them the reverse of attractive.

Besides this, without exception, all were ugly-featured. Many of the men had enormous noses and retreating chins; others possessed huge chins and no nose worth speaking of; some disclosed frightful-looking mouths, with large white teeth; while still others had narrow, ferret-like faces, and others were deformed in their broadness.

Even Zip, who was accustomed to aborigines, noticed the exceptional ugliness of the party.

"I'll be skulped if such a set of skunks hadn't oughter be shot on sight."

The palaver of the red-skins with each other lasted but a few minutes, when they gave utterance to a series of howls and whoops, intended to taunt those within the cabin.

Turning the whole battery of repulsive faces upward against the building, they brandished their guns, tomahawks and knives, and numbers swung their blankets above their heads—and then shook them out toward the cabin—a gesture that is one of the most insulting a Sioux can make to an enemy.

Then their howls were of the most aggravating character, and one pock-marked, broad-faced red-skin, with a broken nose, stepped in front of the others, and deliberately fired his rifle through the open window, after which, as if to show his contempt of his white foes, he raised his thumb to his nose, giving a regular cat-call, as he made his ugly face ten times more ugly, by contorting it like an angry child.

"Blast yer! if yer must have it, there she is!" exclaimed Zip Smith, as he sent a bullet, clean and clear, through the skull of the Sioux, and tumbling him backward to the ground, as dead as dead could be.

"When a man invites me as strong as that, I'll accept the invite, if he is a warmint," he remarked, as, turning away from the loop-hole, he proceeded to reload his piece. "Ef either of you fellers see a good chance, blaze away."

The words had scarce left his mouth, when the sharp report of Hosmer's rifle was heard, almost simultaneous with the death-yelp of his victim.

"That's purty good, younker; keep up that gait, and bime-by they'll stop sassing us. I wonder whar Persimmons is?"

"I trust he is safe," was the sad response of Mrs. Fullerton; "the Indians do not seem to have him with them."

"Dunno 'bout that," said Zip, squinting one eye out the loop-hole. "I've an idee that thar ere red-skin, with his hair painted yeller, and with green and blue spots and rings over his face, is Persimmons in disguise. The feller has kinder got his gait, though I don't see his eye-glasses."

"Can it be possible?" gasped Mrs. Fullerton, who took the badinage of the hunter for dead earnest.

"Kinder looks that way—hold on; he's going to shoot."

As he spoke, the savage referred to discharged his rifle with such remarkable accuracy, that the bullet passed through the very loop-hole from which Zip had withdrawn his rifle while loading it.

"That settles the whole matter," said he, with a triumphant expression of countenance.

"In what manner?" inquired the surprised Mrs. Fullerton.

"If Persimmons had fired that gun at the loop-hole, he would have popped over the red-skin standing right behind him—so you kin rest assured that that ain't Persimmons."

In the meantime, the Sioux were keeping up a dropping fire, discharging their guns into the windows, and aiming at the loop-holes, in the hope of finding some one unawares.

Although they had lost a couple of their number, they did not seem affrighted in the least—but kept up their whoops and tantalizing gestures, as continuously as ever, retreating to the opposite side of the ravine.

Here, after burying about a score of shots in the planking of the cabin, they suddenly divided into two parties again, and vanished from view, with the speed of magic, carrying their dead with them.

"What is the meaning of that?" asked Fullerton, who was not a little amazed at what he had beheld.

"One of the tricks," replied Zip; "be careful to keep your heads away from the winders, or you'll get 'em bored."

The whites were not kept long in doubt regarding the intentions of the Sioux, who had disappeared in such a curious manner.

The first warning came in the shape of a rifle-shot, fired from the opposite side, and at a point somewhat above them.

"Keep down your heads," called out Zip; "they're on top the other side."

Just then, the lynx-eyed hunter discerned the upper part of an Indian's head peering over the edge of the rocks as if to see the result of his shot. Zip rested the barrel of his gun on the edge of the sill, holding it so far back that the muzzle would not be likely to attract notice.

He held his weapon in position long enough to make certain of his aim, and then pulled the trigger.

About the same time the Sioux ducked his head.

It did not appear again.

This warrior was a leading one in the tribe, and many mourned his untimely taking off.

"Do you think they are all there?" asked Ned Hosmer.

"No; there's a lot over our heads, trying to see whether they kin git a crack at us from there."

"Are you sure we are invulnerable from that direction?" inquired Mr. Fullerton, looking rather anxiously around.

"Ef them varmints kin walk with their heads down like flies, why I s'pose we'll see 'em purty soon comin' down the rocks—but I'll send you word when I see 'em."

Several dropping shots came from the opposite side of the ravine, but the result was nothing, as the inmates of the cabin in the air were so well protected that they lost all apprehension of danger.

At the same time, the Sioux had learned the danger that ever menaced them, and became more cautious in their movements. Ned Hosmer and Old Zip caught sight of a sneaking Indian face and both fired at the same instant, but the scamp was too quick and got his precious head out of the way before the bullet could reach it.

Then followed several hours of watching and trying to outwit each other, during which not a single gun was heard, and an oppressive silence rested upon ravine and mountain.

The Sioux prowled about and resorted to every artifice to take the defenders off their guard.

After crawling along the cliff above the cabin, and finding there was no possible way of reaching it from that direction, they gave over that attempt and entered the ravine again.

Here a careful survey of the structure satisfied the red-skins that there was no earthly means by which they could board the aerial ship. If they could fell a number of exceedingly tall trees against it, they might swarm up the limbs; but then there were no trees in the ravine, and it was left to them either to plant some acorns and to wait for them to grow, or to transport some to this spot, already grown, and topple them over against the building.

But careful deliberation showed such serious

objections to both of these schemes, that it cannot be said that the red-skins actually took the plans under consideration.

The sun gradually sunk to rest, and the gathering shades of night darkened ravine and hill, while the whites in the cabin maintained as vigilant a guard as ever, watchful for any chance to pick off their wolf-like foes.

Perhaps the reader has noticed our failure to mention any shot fired by Hugh Fullerton, which is for the good reason that he failed to fire any.

He had heard the words of his wife:

"Perhaps if you don't injure any of them, they may be more tender to Helena."

He heard also the reply of Zip, and he knew the truthfulness of the hunter's observation; but the words of his wife clung to him like a superstition; and although he saw more than one opportunity to pick off his foes, he refrained, leaving that work to his companions, who, as we have shown, were not backward in doing their utmost in that direction.

When darkness settled upon the earth, there remained a slight moon, making objects visible for some distance, but not an Indian or solitary being was to be seen.

"Do you think they have gone?" was the query of the mother, when her friends had given over their watching.

"I think they have," was the reply; "they must know that we've got a good stock of grub laid in yer, so what's the use of thar hanging about to git picked off by our guns?"

"But they must suspect that some of us will try to leave the cabin," said Hugh, "and may be on the look-out for us."

"Mebbe so, but I don't think it."

"Let them suspect it," said Ned Hosmer, with compressed lips; "I'm going down that rope to-night, if I live, and you will never see me again until I bring Helena back with me."

"Thank you for those words," said the mother, pressing the hand of the noble young man; "you have lifted a great weight from my heart."

"And I'm with yer," added Old Zip, in his quiet way. "What's the use of our staying yar and help eat up the hash, when thar's work for us to do? So give us yer hand on thet."

The two grasped hands in the gathering gloom, and the hunter, first carefully stopping the loopholes, said:

"Now, Peggy, strike a light, and keep yer heads away from the winders, and while you're about it I think it's near feeding time."

His good partner acted upon this hint at once, and lit a large wax candle, which was thrust into the neck of a green bottle, and placed upon a shelf, so that the whole interior was quite well illuminated.

Then Peggy produced her bread and ready cooked meat, from which all made a nourishing and substantial meal, she remarking that they always kept several days' supply on hand, so as to be ready at any time for just such an emergency as this.

Zip kept watch of the "signs" among the Indians, and when things looked threatening they laid in an extra supply of food and water, so that in case of a regular siege, there was no reason why they should not be able to hold out for several weeks.

As the moon rose higher in the sky, and shed a stronger light upon the scene, Hugh Fullerton expressed no little concern at the thought of their companions taking their departure, at a time when they were exposed to such imminent danger.

"We kin soon find out," said Zip; "now vatch and listen."

As he spoke, he placed his coon-skin cap upon his ramrod and held it in such a position that it could be plainly seen from the outside, looking as if the owner was leaning against the window.

Divining his purpose, Hosmer did precisely the same at the opposite window, so that if any Indians were watching the cabin, they could not fail to see the opportunity.

"Now, if both of them chignons get bored by a bullet afore a dog kin swaller a piece of meat, then the varmints are on the look-out, otherwise—why otherwise?"

Several minutes passed in the most anxious suspense, during which each listener imagined he could hear the beating of the other's heart.

Suddenly Zip gave a flirt of the ramrod, that dropped his hat back upon his head, and said:

"All right; thar's nothing to be afeard of. Are you ready, Ned?"

"Yes," replied the latter, rising to his feet, but at the same time taking pains to keep his shadow off the window.

"Wal, good-by, Peggy," said Zip, kissing the cheek of his wife with all the vim of a young

lover; "take good care of yourselves till we come back, and, Hugh, you turn the coffee-mill."

"Let me go down first," said Hosmer, pressing forward.

"Not much," replied Zip, pushing him back; "I'm boss of this job."

Danger always threatened in lifting this trap-door, but the hunter was accustomed to it, and he saw that every thing was in proper position before he seated himself in the noose, and gave Hugh the order to pay out the rope.

This was done with great care, and with no little apprehension, in spite of the confident assurances of Zip that no Sioux were in sight.

But he reached the ground in safety, and gave the word to draw up again for Ned.

Ten minutes later Hosmer was on the ground beside him, and the "All right!" was called back to their friends above.

Hugh carefully drew up the rope, and as carefully closed the trap-door, so that there was no danger of any incautious movement precipitating any one below, and then prepared to watch through the weary night before them.

CHAPTER V.

HELENA FULLERTON.

WE must wait a few minutes longer before returning to Percy Fitzsimmons, while we trace the course of one in whom we doubt not the reader has already begun to feel interested. We refer to Helena Fullerton, the heroine of this narrative.

As has been intimated, in another place, she was visiting a relative, in the little town of Alden, a few miles distant, where her parents supposed she would remain in perfect safety during the terrible massacre that had broken out, and to which point, to make assurance doubly sure, Ned Hosmer was dispatched, to prevent her return, but only to learn that she had left that place a number of hours before, and at that moment was somewhere in the most dangerous territory.

The true cause for Helena's sudden departure for home had been suspected by her parents, being solicitude and concern for their safety. In tending to spend several days longer in Alden, word reached her one evening, from a trustworthy source, of the appalling massacres that were sweeping over Minnesota, and that numbers of Indians were hovering in the neighborhood of the settlement, with the purpose undoubtedly of cutting off all stragglers and detached settlers.

That was a night of anguish to the maiden, who saw her parents, in imagination, suffering the dreadful death of the tomahawk while her home was wrapped in flames. At the earliest appearance of light she left Alden, concealing the true cause of her haste from her friends, as she knew that they would not permit her to go, if they knew it.

Helena was in perfect health, symmetrical in form, and in the very prime of beauteous young womanhood, so that the walk was nothing to her.

She had no gun or ammunition in her possession, but carried a small "Smith and Wesson's" revolver, each of whose seven chambers was loaded. This was a present to her from Ned Hosmer, who made her promise to carry it with her whenever she left home.

Helena kept the main road the greater part of the way, although she knew she was thereby exposed to the greatest danger. For all this distance she did not encounter a living person. While still several miles from her home, she discovered off to the left, a heavy mass of smoke slowly rising in the horizon, and spreading away like a mass of dark clouds against the sky.

"The house of some settler who was not able to get out of their way," she concluded, as she paused a few moments to watch the impressive sight.

The maiden now advanced with hesitating steps, fearful that at every bend in the road, or extension of her view, she would catch sight of the dreadful beings that she knew were at their hellish work.

This was a wise precaution, for while passing along a piece of woods, something like a shout, some distance ahead, caught her ear, and, quick as thought, she sprang among the trees and concealed herself.

Quick as she was, she was not a moment too soon; for when she stealthily peered out from her hiding-place, she saw three filthy-looking Sioux, mounted on horses, galloping by. They were going in the direction of Alden, and in a few minutes were out of sight.

Helena did not stir until they had vanished,

and then she was convinced that it would not do for her to follow the road, which led directly by her home, any longer. She was within a couple of miles of home, and, provided she was not interfered with, was certain of reaching it before nightfall.

She had advanced with such care and hesitation over the latter part of the way, that she found, upon examining her watch, that the afternoon was well along.

The girl was acquainted with the country in which she now found herself, as she had frequently hunted in and roamed over it with Ned Hosmer; so, leaving the road out of sight, she began making her way across field and through forest toward home.

And while thus engaged, Ned Hosmer himself hurried over the same highway, on his return from Alden in search of her, and thus narrowly she escaped meeting her lover and reaching the cabin in the air, a few hours later, where, for the time with her parents, she would have been safe from all danger from the marauding Sioux.

Still pressing forward in the same careful manner, she succeeded in reaching an uncultivated meadow, from which she descried the chimney and roof of her house. She gave a sigh of relief, as she saw the familiar and dearly-loved sight.

"Thank God! they have not yet burned that," was her fervent exclamation, as she looked up at the blue sky, and invoked the protection of Heaven upon those who, at that moment, were dearer to her than her own life.

"But where are father and mother?" was the question that rose to her lips, as she began making her way through the field of corn, toward the house. "Are they still unaware of their dreadful danger?"

With a feeling of fearful anxiety, difficult to understand, she hurried forward, and a few minutes later, had crossed the field of corn, and paused with her house full in view before her.

There it stood as still and quiet as when, a few days before, she had turned to cast one loving last glance upon it, when departing for her visit to Alden; and scrutinizing it for a few moments, she could detect nothing of an alarming and unusual character.

"Can it be that they are still unharmed?" she whispered.

Hope was rising in her breast, when her heart was nearly frozen with horror as she saw the door open and an Indian come out, followed by another and another, until a round half-dozen stood on the outside, looking up at the building, as though debating the best style by which to make a bonfire of it.

"Merciful heaven!" gasped Helena, sinking upon her knees, "they have perished—all are gone."

But look!

Another Indian appears escorting a prisoner. "It is father—they are going to slay him."

And in her agony of grief she was about to rush forward, and interpose herself, like Pocahontas, between the upraised tomahawk and its victim—when the Indians, who were constantly changing position, moved so that she could see the man distinctly, and then she became aware that he was a stranger.

Wondering what it could all mean, she so far forgot her prudence in her curiosity, that she placed herself in imminent peril of discovery from the Indians themselves.

She was near enough to see that the stranger was very fashionably dressed, and was of a very attenuated frame.

"Oh! it's cousin Percy," she exclaimed, as she shrunk back into greater concealment. "Poor fellow! he has arrived just in time to fall into the hands of these ferocious brutes."

But, much as she was disposed to sympathize with him, her solicitude for her parents outweighed everything else. Scarcely deigning to think of her own safety, she advanced to the fence, which bounded the cornfield, and peered through at the savages, who stood for some time gesticulating and talking quite earnestly.

Whether they were discussing the prisoner's fate, or what should be done with the building, or both, could only be conjectured by the watcher—but the discussion became quite earnest, and then, cautiously enough, ceased all at once, by the Sioux marching away, with their captive in their hands, and without offering the slightest harm to the building.

Helena was quick-witted; the solution of this unexpected turn instantly suggested itself to her.

"They know that some member of the family is absent, and by going away and watching, hope to entrap me."

Such being her conclusion, it was not to be supposed that she would advance directly into the trap thus set for her—especially as it was demonstrated to her, that no person was now in the house.

"Father and mother are gone," she concluded; "but where, who can tell? Can it be that Zip Smith has warned them in time, and they have gone off to his cabin for safety?"

The more she reflected upon the question she had asked herself, the more hopeful did she become that such good fortune had come to them.

Accordingly, after holding the house under surveillance for some time longer, she retreated back into the cornfield, and started by a circuitous route for the mountainous woods in which she knew the hunter made his home.

Helena Fullerton had now placed herself in the very focus of danger from the Indians, and crossing fields and passing through woods, she needed guidance to escape these wretches, who, it may be said, haunted the white settlers of this young State of the West.

The girl picked her way with the greatest caution, across several partially-cleared fields, and had reached the base of the hill referred to, when she paused for a short rest, before attempting the laborious task of climbing over this difficult section.

She had been on her feet constantly since morning, since which time she had not eaten anything. Finding herself where there was an abundance of blackberries growing, she plucked a number, and then knelt down beside a small spring that bubbled from beneath a dark rock, and that was of icy coldness; she slaked her thirst, then bathed her warm face and hands, and sat down on a broad, flat stone, with a sigh of weariness.

The sun was getting low in the west, but knowing the woods as well as she did, she was confident of reaching the cabin in the course of an hour—so she concluded to give herself the rest she so much needed.

Some fifteen or twenty minutes had thus passed away, when she was not a little alarmed by discovering in the soft earth before her, the imprint of an Indian's moccasin.

"Made but a short time ago," she exclaimed, as she leaned over and examined it.

This made it look as though the danger was closer than she imagined, and it made her uneasy again.

Just as she was on the point of starting again, she was startled by hearing the murmur of voices close to her. She listened attentively, unable to distinguish words, but able to tell that it came from a portion of the woods directly in front of her, and quite close at hand.

There was a peculiar guttural, bass-like character to the tones, that satisfied her that the voices belonged to Indians, and consequently that the best thing she could do was to get out of their way as soon as possible.

"Perhaps father and mother are with them," was the thought that chained her feet; "if so I cannot leave them."

After a few minutes' hesitation, she began making her way toward them with the deliberation and care of a genuine Indian scout.

The trees were not only close together, but so thickly choked with undergrowth that this was a work of extreme difficulty, it requiring much more care to insinuate her skirts through the vegetation, than it would for a man to make his way.

But Helena succeeded so well, that she gained the point she was seeking without discovery.

The sight that rewarded her labor was altogether different from what she anticipated, although not without interest.

Three Indians, seamed, scarred, daubed and dirty, were reclining lazily upon the ground, each smoking a black common clay pipe, in the most indolent manner possible, while between them sat Percy Fitzsimmons smoking a cigar, apparently with the same indifference as they, but a keen observer would have detected an uneasy twitching about his eyes, that proved he was far from feeling comfortable in his present situation.

In some respects the scene was ludicrous. Percy sported a small gold watch, with an enormous plated chain, and a seal about the size of a hen's egg. One of the Sioux had possessed himself of this, and had tied the watch to one of his flopping ears, like a pendant, where his tympanum could be tickled by the ticking of the piece. The chain had been looped around one of his ankles, where it excited scarcely less admiration upon his part.

The snowy white vest that had ornamented the person of Fitzsimmons was in the hands of

another noble red-man, who had pushed his legs through the arm-holes; the third had hooked the brilliant red satin cravat into his moccasin.

This same dog had drawn upon the back of his head the beaver that had cost the rightful owner nine dollars on Chestnut street, while Percy was now compelled to don the little patent hat, that he could double up into nothing almost and carry in his pocket.

So, although his possessions were distributed somewhat injudiciously, it may be said that Percy was quite fortunate in being left so well off as he was.

They had deprived him of his gun, pistol and ammunition, as a matter of course, but he still retained the paper of arsenic in the inside pocket of his coat, and he clung to it with a tenacity that was the result of a conviction, that it was yet to do him yeoman service.

Helena Fullerton gazed on this scene for several moments, hardly knowing what to make of it. She had seen Percy conducted away from the house as a prisoner, and it seemed curious that his captors were so indulgent toward him, as to permit him to smoke in their presence without a word upon their part against it.

The Sioux were conversing in a sort of swinish way, their utterances sounding very much like the grunting of so many pigs, all of which being in their own tongue, was unintelligible to the listeners.

Fitzsimmons continued meditatively smoking his cigar, keeping his eyes upon his captors, as if distrustful of their intentions, while, at the same time, he did his utmost to keep up a good understanding with the wild men.

"By Jove! if they ain't the confoundest looking creatures I ever laid eyes on!" he muttered, as his eyes roamed from one to the other. "I don't believe they have been within a half a mile of water for a year past, and what fishy eyes, and hideous faces, and black teeth, and disproportionate noses and chins, and that one sitting there with my hat on the back of his head, as proud as Lucifer, is so bow-legged, that if he puts his heels together a hog might jump between his knees without grazing either side. But hang it, I don't like it, and I wish I was out of their hands. If I could only manage to get word to President Lincoln, I think he would arrange an exchange without delay."

"But, how am I to get word to him? that's the question," added the prisoner, "puffing harder at his cigar; 'there ain't any telegraphs handy, and if there were, these dogs would scalp all the operators, before they could send the telegram.'"

Hedged in by difficulty and danger on all sides, it can not be wondered that Percy should feel exceedingly disgusted. Suddenly he thought of Zip Smith, the hunter whom he encountered during the forenoon.

"I wonder if he can't be turned to account? In all the Indian stories and novels that I have read, there is always a sharp-witted hunter that can't talk good English, but knows more than all the Indians together. Now, I wonder if Old Zip can't fill that rôle? If he can, I'll embalm him in a stunning story that will take down the Leatherstocking novels altogether."

All this was good enough in its way, but there remained the ever-present danger of these three savages, who were right at hand, and who might take it into their heads at any minute to send him out of existence, with as little compunction as they would crush the serpent under their heels.

"I expected to catch it; when the old chap hauled me up out of the cellar, and I think that was his idea; but I think there was something in my appearance, when exposed to the broad light of the sun, that arrested their attention at once. They saw that I was no ordinary person; my *distingué* appearance has impressed them with the idea that I am some distinguished individual of great value to the Government; one whom it will pay to keep, for my exchange value. If such be the case—and it begins to look as though it is—then Percy Fitzsimmons may be set down as a lucky dog; but otherwise—otherwise."

All manner of wild schemes entered the brain of Fitzsimmons, but, when coolly considered, were found impracticable. Two or three times he reflected what a grand thing it would be for him to turn on his enemies in his wrath and knock the whole three in the head, and then walk away with their three scalps as trophies.

But this scheme he concluded to defer until night, when all three would be asleep, and when, as a consequence, he would be exposed to less interruption during the performance.

The three Sioux were reclining upon the ground in such a posture that their faces were toward the captive, and his was toward them. Consequently, while Helena from her conceal-

ment was facing her cousin, the backs of the red-skins were toward her.

This made her danger of discovery from them very slight, so long as she exercised ordinary care, although there was the probability that she would be seen by Percy himself.

The maiden stood several minutes, until she fully understood matters, and saw that it was out of her power to do any thing for her cousin.

"If father and mother are prisoners, they are with another party," she concluded, "and I may as well withdraw and see if they are in the cabin in the air."

With this purpose, she began stepping carefully backward. In doing so she prevented herself from making any noise, but she unconsciously stepped slightly out of the line of the tree, and, as fate would have it, Percy Fitzsimmons was gazing at that point at that very moment.

The sight of his cousin was so unexpected, that he could not avoid starting and muttering: "By Jove!"

At that instant he reflected upon the inadvertency he had committed, and he endeavored to look unconcerned and indifferent; but the Sioux had noted the suspicious movement, and all three sprung to their feet with the quickness of lightning, and looked off in the direction in which he had been looking at the moment he uttered the exclamation.

Desirous of undoing the mischief he had done, Fitzsimmons said to the red-skins, all of whom were capable of speaking broken English:

"Something caught my eye out there, but I guess it was nothing more than a stray camel, or tiger, or kangaroo, that is wandering through the woods. Sit down—sit down, and enjoy your pipes."

"What you see?" demanded the savage who had escorted Percy from the cellar of his uncle's house.

"Nothing in particular—what's the use of disturbing yourself—sit down and enjoy your smoke."

But the Sioux were of too suspicious a nature to be thrown off the trail in this manner, and seeing nothing to explain the sudden excitement of their prisoner, they began walking in that direction.

CHAPTER VI.

SEASONED FOOD.

HELENA FULLERTON realized her danger the instant it impended, and instead of starting to flee, she quietly sunk down upon her hands and knees out of sight, and began moving off at right-angles to the course she had started upon, her purpose being to get far enough into the undergrowth to permit her to proceed at a more rapid gait.

She would have accomplished her purpose had the Sioux remained by the camp-fire; but, in accordance with their suspicious nature, the whole three strode off rapidly toward the point where she had been standing.

"Run, Helena, they're coming!" shouted Percy Fitzsimmons, certain that that was all that remained for her to do.

The poor girl needed not this admonition, for she had scented the danger as soon as her cousin, and was speeding through the forest, like a frightened doe.

The quick ears of the Indians detected her presence at once, and while one ran back to keep charge of the man (who was beginning to swell at the thought of his chances of escape), the other two sped after the fair fugitive.

Fleet of foot, as Helena unquestionably was, she had not the remotest chance against these dusky dogs, who seemed to speed through the undergrowth and among the limbs with the unerring accuracy of a bird on the wing.

After fleeing a short distance, she turned to see whether any of her pursuers were in sight, when she felt the gripe of an Indian upon her arm, and she barely saved herself from sinking with terror.

He jerked her roughly to her feet and started back to the camp-fire with her, encountering his companion after they had taken a few steps.

At this juncture the girl thought of the revolver she carried in her bosom, and she regretted that she had not drawn it, and shot both her captors, as she could have done, with little difficulty; but, as he held her with a pinching, immovable grasp upon the right arm, she was unable to seize it.

"I will wait," she concluded; "I will not ever be held thus, and every chamber of the weapon was loaded by Ned himself, so that I can depend upon them all."

The meeting between the two cousins was a peculiar one. Percy made an elaborate bow, as though saluting a belle upon Chestnut or Broad street. Then he gave her his hand, apologized for his appearance, and expressed his regret that through an oversight of his, he had brought her into this unfortunate position.

Then followed a mutual exchange of experiences, the result of which was the conviction upon the part of our heroine that her parents had escaped.

"I ain't so certain about that," said Percy; "I only know that they got away from their house before the Indians reached it, and before they went through me so confoundedly."

"But they went in the company of Old Zip, and he has taken them to his cabin in the air, where a thousand Indians can not harm them."

"Does he live in that house stuck on the side of the rocks?" asked Percy, in amazement.

"He and his wife spend a good deal of their time there, and if you have seen it, you can understand that it is perfectly inaccessible to an enemy."

"Yes; to anybody, for I waved my handkerchief and called till I was hoarse, and it didn't do any good. When I got off a good ways from the hut, I looked back and saw a man going up a rope."

"That proves they are safe. Oh! how thankful I am!" and in her joy at the assurance of her parents' safety, she actually sprang up from the ground and clapped her hands, with such childish delight that all three of the Indians looked at her, with a curious, amused expression.

"You forget that you are a prisoner," said Fitzsimmons, with a reproving air, "and that I am too."

"Indeed, cousin Percy, I am sorry for you, for this at the best will be a dismal visit for you. Have hope now, especially as a brave young friend of mine is expected out this way to engage in a hunt with Old Zip, and they two," she added, in a lower voice, "I think will be able to do something for us."

"Who is that fellow?" asked Fitzsimmons, who was so struck with the fascinating person and manner of his cousin, that he felt fearfully jealous at once.

"Ned Hosmer, from Saint Paul; he spends a good deal of time hunting in this part of the State."

"Why, that's the fellow I heard Old Zip speak of this morning."

"What did he say?" asked Helena, with such eagerness, that Percy was quite wrathful.

"Seems to me, you are confoundedly interested in that chap, Helena."

"Oh—now, Percy, don't keep me in suspense," she pleaded; "how can I help feeling interested? What did he say of Ned?"

"That he had gone to Alden to tell you to stay there till the storm was over."

"Oh! isn't that too bad? and we have passed each other on the way without knowing it!"

"By Jove!" muttered Fitzsimmons, "but this won't do; I must see this presumptuous youngster, and take some of the conceit out of him—but we mustn't forget that we are in rather a bad fix," he added, aloud, rousing himself to a sense of his danger. "Helena, all the rest, I doubt not, will be able to take care of themselves—but what is to become of us?"

This fragmentary conversation was exceptional in every respect. In the surprise and peculiar emotions of their first meeting, and the subsequent excitement of the lady, occasioned by the news regarding her parents and her lover, both forgot that they were captives in the hands of three of the most bloodthirsty red-skins of the North-west—men who would shrink at no cruelty or outrage upon their helpless victims.

While the latter exchanged these words, these three stood somewhat apart listening to them, as though they understood every word that was said.

We have remarked on the general character of the attire of Percy Fitzsimmons; and of Helena have only to say, that her dress, although plain, was such as to make her beauty the more attracting and bewitching. Her dress was of buff linen, such as are common nowadays for traveling-suits. She wore no jewelry, except a gold watch, chain, and plain ring upon her betrothal finger—all presented to her, by her affianced, Ned Hosmer.

Her hat was one of those jaunty, saucy contrivances, that make a homely woman look well, and a handsome one bewilderingly enchanting. She carried nothing in her hand but her parasol, which was spread, when traveling in the sunlight, and shut when in the woods;

and as she stood, with flushed face, talking and listening to her cousin, there are few prettier figures that can be imagined.

Percy was smitten to the heart—and was certain he had never encountered any thing half so lovely, while the three Indians stood looking at her, with evil eyes, equally positive in the same opinion.

The object of all this admiration—although she "knew herself" very well—was unconscious of the excitement she had caused.

She could only think of her imperiled, but, as she now believed, saved parents, and of him compared to whom all other men were but as chaff in the balance; but, when her cousin reminded her of their mutual danger, she awoke to a sense of her situation, and shuddered as she saw the dark, evil eyes of the savages fixed upon her.

The shrewd girl concluded it the part of prudence not to see these malignant glances of her captors, while, with a thrill of hope, she made sure by a casual movement of her hand, that her revolver was in its place, where she could seize it almost in an instant.

As fortune would have it, the party had halted near a fallen tree, upon which Fitzsimmons took his seat and invited his cousin to do the same.

"Will you take charge of my parasol?" she asked, handing it to him, as she accepted the proffered seat.

"With all the pleasure in the world," he replied, rising and doffing his hat like a veritable Chesterfield, and little suspecting that the true reason of this request, was that her hands might be free, so as the better to use her pistol should occasion demand.

When they had seated themselves thus, two of the Indians threw themselves upon the ground, where they were within reach, while the third started off in quest of game for supper.

The sun had set, and it was already growing dark in the woods, and, although, as has been remarked in another place, there was quite a bright moon, the forest, with its towering trees and dense undergrowth, made the gloom almost like that of midnight.

But before it was fairly dark, one of the savages kindled a fire, which, as the night was quite warm, was undoubtedly intended to cook whatever game might be brought in.

"Are you hungry, cousin Helena?" asked Percy, in a cautious voice, as he observed these preparations.

"Well, yes, I feel the need of food," she replied with a laugh.

"Do you think you can stand it until to-morrow?"

"Certainly, if necessary—but why do you ask?"

"They will offer you meat, won't they?"

"I suppose so; if they don't I shall ask them for it."

"Well, I was going to advise you not to eat it."

"Why not? I know they are not very tidy in appearance, but I can forget that at such a time as this."

Fitzsimmons edged up somewhat nearer his cousin, so as to make sure that no one heard him, and then said, in a hasty, hurried undertone:

"I'm going to poison the meat!"

"What!" she gasped, turning about and facing him, as if uncertain that she had heard aright.

"I'm going to poison their meat!" he repeated, in a sepulchral voice, as if horrified at the sound of his own words.

"How can you do that?"

"I have a paper of arsenic that I got out of your cellar. I suppose it was put there to poison rats, but I will put it to a nobler use."

Helena turned pale; there was something so dreadful in the plan proposed by her cousin that her soul revolted.

"Don't do it, Percy," she said, after a moment's pause.

"Why not?"

"It is too dreadful; it seems too much like downright murder."

"I can't see it in that light," he replied, rather petulantly. "I believe they intend to kill us both, and as they stole my weapons, that's the only way I have of getting even with them."

"They have not stolen mine," she said, significantly.

It was now the turn of Fitzsimmons to look amazed, and he asked, in the same sepulchral tone:

"What weapons have you got?"

"A seven-barrel revolver."

"Is it loaded?"

"Of course—otherwise it would be of no account."

"Ain't that bully! Just slip it around the leg, and drop it on the ground; then I'll drop my hat alongside of it, and pick them both up together, and then I'll sit here and sight each of those fellows in turn and pop them over like so many ten-pins; then we'll get up, arrange our toilet, and take a moonlight promenade to the cabin in the air."

Fitzsimmons was earnest in this proposal, but Helena was in no danger of accepting it.

She shook her head decidedly.

"I think, Percy, I can fire a pistol with as much accuracy as you, and possibly with more."

"I don't doubt that—but then think of the fitness of things: it's a man's place to save a woman, not vice versa."

"When fortune has placed the opportunity in his hands."

"No matter in what shape," Fitzsimmons hastened to say, "which brings us back to the 'cold poison' again."

But the maiden shook her head.

"It seems to me like a crime to do any thing in such cold blood as that."

"And how do you propose to handle your pistol?"

"Not to use it, unless violence is offered, and then I shall not fire until after I have warned them."

"Too chivalrous altogether; but, here comes a haunch of something or other."

"It is a quarter of a sheep," said Helena, as the Indian brought it up by the bright light of the camp-fire; "I have no doubt it has been taken from our own flock."

"Which makes the crime all the greater; they are going to prepare supper sure enough."

Such was the case, and little time was wasted by the Sioux. With their sharp hunting-knives it required but a few minutes for them to dress the meat, which was skewered on pieces of green wood, and then turned over the fire while it rapidly cooked.

Percy Fitzsimmons was filled with a stern resolve, for he believed that the critical time was at hand.

Without any hint to his cousin of his purpose, he rose from the tree, and walked to where the squatting Sioux was toasting his face, almost as much as the meat, and remarked, in the blandest of voices:

"It will give me great pleasure, my dear fellow, to relieve you at what I judge to be a task not absolutely free from embarrassing accompaniments."

While it can not be said that the red-skin understood this magnificent jumble of words, he yet gained an idea of the meaning of the proffer, and he submitted the superintendence to the white man, grunting out:

"Take care—much burn—so go—much t'ink."

"That's the opinion I have always expressed," replied Percy, as he perched himself alongside the blazing embers, and made his first essay in the culinary art.

As he did so, he cast a furtive glance toward Helena, upon whose face the firelight shone full and fair.

Her looks showed that she divined his purpose, and she shook her head as a warning for him not to attempt a scheme that seemed to her little short of the diabolical.

"It is a distinguishing trait of the Fitzsimmons family, from Richard Plantagenet down to the present generation, that they always stuck to a thing, when they undertook it, unless they concluded it more prudent to give it up, which I don't think in the present circumstances, so the thing must go ahead or something shall be broke."

When Fitzsimmons came to reflect upon the gravity of the thing he had undertaken, involving as it did the lives of the three persons, it can scarcely be wondered that he felt somewhat "shaky," and wished the "confounded thing" was over.

But grave as was the business he was none the less resolved upon undertaking it and carrying it through, if such a thing were within the range of human possibility.

The difficulty was to get the whitish powder upon the meat, without attracting the notice of the Sioux, who are always suspicious, but a cool head and steady hand were all that was necessary.

In changing the stick from one pan to another, it was comparatively easy to flit a little of the deadly mineral upon the cooking meat. This could be repeated several times, when there ought to be enough "death" in the food to lay out a dozen men.

Grasping the stick with his left hand, Percy

desperately jammed his right down into the inside pocket, beneath his left shoulder. There were several articles here, but certain of the right one, he caught the stiff brown paper, and attempted to untie the bundle.

As is always the case at such times, the knot was so securely tied that this was found impossible, and he began to get mad. "I might be sure of that," he growled, as he spitefully jammed his finger through the paper; "but I'll get it somehow."

He soon succeeded in securing a pinch of it, which he brought out, and then, as he passed the stick over to the other hand, he managed quite dextrously to sow it all over the meat.

"So far so good," he concluded, quite satisfied with his success; "two or three exploits like that and every thing will be put in ship-shape."

Looking up, he saw the reproachful dark eyes of Helena Fullerton fixed upon him, mutely protesting against this dark proceeding, but the individuals most concerned seemed sublimely indifferent to what was going on around them, in the culinary line.

"Here she goes again," muttered the hero, as he made another plunge into his pocket, and secured some more between his thumb and finger. This he transferred to his left hand, so as to make the affair appear more natural, but, in attempting to scatter it over the nearly-broiled meat, he missed it altogether, and flung it into the fire.

Helena Fullerton, who was watching her cousin with an eager intensity, saw this miscarriage, and she observed another thing that escaped the eye of her cousin.

One of the Indians saw the same thing, and looked inquiringly at the vexed white man, as if he would like to know the meaning of such a performance.

But Fitzsimmons failed to note this, so intent was he on getting through with the performance as soon as possible.

It was not long, therefore, before he made another grasp of the mineral, taking which in his right hand, he easily managed to fling it over the meat.

"Once more I think will finish that."

In his eagerness to perform his self-allotted task, Percy had scorched his hands and face so that they smarted not a little.

"I do believe my nose is as thoroughly roasted as that mutton," he growled, pausing a moment to rub his nasal protuberance; "but I must go her once more."

By this time he had worked down so deep in his pocket, that it was a matter of no small difficulty to fish up what he wished. He succeeded at last, however, and grabbed half a handful of the white powder, which he took out and deliberately scattered over the meat, as though he were seasoning it with salt.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed to himself. "I think that job is about as complete as it can well be."

When this was done, so was the meat, and one of the Sioux approached with the remark:

"Much good—t'ink."

"I am sure you will find it so," said Fitzsimmons, rising to his feet and handing it over to him.

While the red-skin was giving the meat the last touches, Percy rejoined his cousin upon the fallen tree.

"Didn't I do the thing nicely?" he asked, triumphantly, as though he had accomplished a most meritorious act.

"I am sorry to say you did," she answered, in a very sad voice.

"You will feel different when you see those three red-skins stretched out upon the ground and giving up the ghost one after the other—"

"Oh! Percy!" she pleaded, raising her hand, as if to shut out the dreadful sight.

He was enjoying his triumph, when she suddenly looked up.

"You made one great oversight."

"What was that?" he asked, quickly.

"You didn't watch the Indians themselves."

"By Jove! After I got started I forgot that, but none of them noticed me, did they?"

"That one that took the meat from you, never took his eyes from you during the last fifteen minutes. He saw you fail once, when you tried to throw the poison in with your left hand, and saw each effort afterward."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; and his suspicions have been on the alert ever since. He knows you were trying to play some trick. I coughed once or twice to warn you, but you would not look, and, if you had, I do not suppose you would have stopped. But here he comes to offer you the first piece of meat."

CHAPTER VII.

SWALLOWING HIS OWN MEDICINE.

SUCH beyond a doubt was the purpose of the Sioux, who, having severed quite a goodly-sized piece of meat from the main portion, advanced to where the two prisoners sat, and handed it to Fitzsimmons.

"Much eat—good."

"No, I thank you," replied the young man, bowing gracefully and waving the donor away. "I'm dieting myself just now, and have forsworn mutton and lamb."

Instead of passing on and offering the food to the lady, the Indian stood still, and repeated:

"Much eat—good."

"Is he the fellow that watched me?" asked Percy, in a side-whisper to Helena. She nodded in the affirmative, and he began to suspect that he had gotten himself in an embarrassing position.

"Haven't I told you I didn't wish it?" replied Fitzsimmons, quite excitedly. "It isn't gentlemanly or polite to urge a fellow to drink, after he has signed the pledge."

"You eat—me kill."

This command was uttered in unmistakable language, accompanied by an expressive grasping of the handle of his knife, that protruded from his belt, and there was an evil gleam of the eye at the same time.

"But I can not eat when I ain't hungry."

"You eat—me kill."

"Heavens! is there no escape from this?" wailed the terrified Fitzsimmons, looking pleadingly to his cousin. "Can't you help me?"

Helena was terribly agitated and did not refuse the appeal, so piteously made:

"Why do you urge him to eat, when he doesn't wish to do so?" she asked, stepping up in front of the savage. "Throw the meat aside, and get more."

"Tell him I was always a stubborn boy, and nobody tried to drive me to do any thing, because it wasn't any use."

"Put powder on meat—me see—he eat—den Injin eat," added the savage, whose deadly earnestness was not to be mistaken. "He eat—me kill."

"I do not see what I can do for you, Percy," she said, utterly miserable at the turn affairs had taken.

"Why, let me have your pistol, and I'll do something," and as he made this demand, he stepped toward her, as if to take the weapon; but his master interposed, and drawing his knife from the girdle, uttered his command once more.

By this time the other two Indians had gathered around, and were deeply-interested spectators, no doubt fully understanding what it all meant.

Helena was so terribly agitated, that she turned her head and walked a few steps away, unable to look upon the scene.

Poor Fitzsimmons was in an agony of terror—for he could see no escape—it being merely a choice of deaths.

The cold perspiration stood upon him, and he fell almost paralyzed. When he recalled what he had done to the meat that was held out so invitingly before him, he turned his look aside, with a shudder, and resolved that he wouldn't touch it.

But when he looked up, there stood the painted savage, as inexorable as Fate, and it was pretty plain that he had reached the extremity of endurance, and would resort to the knife, if there was longer hesitation.

Suddenly he remembered that he had read or heard, that an overdose of arsenic failed of causing death—while only a small portion was needed to accomplish the purpose.

Although little versed in toxicology, it came to him like inspiration that if he should eat a large quantity of meat, although certain of distressing sickness for a time, there was more chance of life than in braving the "cold steel" of his master.

"Well, since you insist upon it," said he, reaching out and taking the food, "I shall have to oblige you, I suppose."

The next moment, Fitzsimmons was devouring the meat, as though he were a contestant for the championship, while the three spectators watched his motions with no little interest, the maiden standing off, with her back toward him, unable to look upon the scene.

It is hard to understand the emotions of a man who is doing his utmost to swallow enough poison to render it powerless—who knows and yet is uncertain of the precise moment, that there is a time, when he has just the right quantity in his system to insure certain death, and is striving, with all his ability, to pass that point.

The meat was of goodly size, and never did Percy Fitzsimmons use his molars as he did on the present occasion. In an incredibly short time, he had swallowed the last morsel and clamored for more.

"I haven't half enough," he called out, "give me another piece—quick, before I starve."

None of the Sioux moved—seeming to think he had eaten enough for an ordinary meal.

"Helena! Helena! as you love me, give me a piece of meat and be quick!" he called to his cousin.

As the girl had no knife in her possession, she picked up the entire piece, that was burned in some parts to a crisp, and hastily carried it to the gourmand.

She latter seized it with both hands, and resumed his gastronomic performances like a famished man.

Never had Percy Fitzsimmons eaten such a meal as he now threw himself outside of. It was immense, and swelled him up like a frog.

But there is a limit to all earthly things, and at length he reached that point when it was absolutely impossible to swallow another mouthful, and it required no little effort to keep down the usual freight with which he had already charged his stomach.

There was no question but what the Indians suspected the nature of the trick their prisoner had attempted, and so they compelled the physician to take his own medicine, and then watched the result.

Rising from the log it really seemed to Percy as if he could not contain all that he had eaten, but, as the occasion was an unusual one, so his capacity was exceptional in the present instance.

Feeling that it was very probable that the results would be fatal, he walked over to where his cousin was standing dejected and weeping.

"Well, Helena," he said, in the most dolorous voice, "it's all down. I've done it."

"Did you eat all the meat?" she asked, endeavoring to rouse herself.

"By Jove! no; but I have masticated and swallowed more food than I ever did at a single sitting in my life. I'm chock full of poison."

She looked at him with a sort of terror, and asked, falteringly:

"How soon will—that is—how soon will you begin to feel it?"

"Pretty soon—right away, I believe—I think I can detect a sickness of the stomach gradually coming on this minute."

"Then, Percy, spend your last moments solemnly. Have you any messages to send to your friends at Philadelphia?"

"I have lots of them—so many that there isn't any use of trying; but I will bid you good-by."

"No, no, no," she replied, impetuously; "not yet—sit down by yourself. I will watch by you, and do everything that I can for you, but it is too soon to bid you good-by."

"But," continued Fitzsimmons, showing a curious emotion, "I must tell you, Helena, that I deeply—deeply love you."

"Of course; we are cousins and have always thought a great deal of each other from childhood. I know that, Percy."

"But I mean to tell you that I love you more than that—that no one else has ever dared to feel the peculiar tenderness toward you that I hold this minute, and if I am not mistaken this, dear Helena, is not altogether unreciprocated. In the words of the laureate:

"If by signs my heart can tell,

Maiden, I have watched thee daily,

And I think thou lovest me well."

"Tell me, dearest Helena, let me hear the sweet avowal before I take my departure."

It would be hard to imagine a more embarrassing situation than that of Helena Fullerton. It was impossible to misunderstand her cousin, although she strove to parry his approach, and she knew not what reply to make. She had not a particle of love for him—such as was that of which he spoke—for her whole soul was wrapped up in that of the noble Ned Hosmer.

And yet, above all things, she was anxious to avoid wounding the feelings of her cousin. She felt as though she would do anything almost, that could divert his mind from the painful subject, and yet she was sorely at her wits' end.

Silent a moment, she was compelled to make answer to that earnest question, shown more in the eager, questioning look than in the words themselves.

"Dear Percy, this is no time for such questions. If you feel that death is so near, your thoughts should be centered on that alone. Dismiss all else from your mind."

"I intend to do that in a few minutes; but you cannot imagine how deeply, truly, fondly—"

"Oh, don't—don't," she pleaded, turning her head away; "this is cruel to me."

"But is it not cruel to me, to refuse my dying request? Oh! oh! I felt a twinge then."

Helena, desirous as she was of sparing the feelings of her relative, could not deceive him. So, looking him full in the face, she said, in a low, but unwavering voice:

"Percy, I am engaged to be married this autumn to Edward Hosmer, and if my life is spared to meet him, my promise shall be kept."

"Oh! that is all right," replied the imperturbable Percy, "You know a great many marriages take place where the love is all on one side."

"What do you mean to insinuate by that?" she demanded, looking earnestly at him.

"I have never seen this counter-jumper from St. Paul, but I doubt not that your marriage was arranged to suit your parents."

This was enough to offend any plighted maiden, and Helena certainly felt the extremely bad taste of the remark, but, recalling the peculiar situation of her cousin, her sympathy outbalanced every other emotion.

"Percy, do you doubt that my affianced loves me?"

"Not in the least; indeed I am sure of it, for you are so confoundingly pretty that every one must admire and love you to distraction."

"You have admitted that—then you will believe me, when I declare to you, that I love Ned Hosmer with my full heart—love him, as I have never loved, and can never love another. I have an affection for you, and my heart is deeply saddened at your unfortunate position; but, certainly you can no longer mistake my meaning. Now let us make no further reference to it. Tell me, can I do anything for you?"

"I have a few trifles in my possession that I will turn over to you," said Percy, in a changed voice. "I have several photographs of young lady friends of mine. Here is Isabella Livingston, a belle on Broad street, and Sophionia Juggerton—whose father struck oil—a good catch, but she ain't pretty; then here is—but what is the use of telling you their names when you don't know them?"

"How many photographs have you, Percy?"

"I had thirteen when I started from home, but I am afraid I have lost some, or else," he added, fumbling in his pockets, "these thieves have robbed me of them."

"And you wish me to return each of them?"

"Yes; you will find their names and address written on a slip of paper, and inserted in the back. You see I got them mixed sometimes, and I hit on this plan to keep things straight. I wish you to return each of these to the address written on the back, with a few lines describing my lamentable death, and assure each and all that my last thoughts were of them."

Despite the solemnity of the occasion there was something so ridiculous in these remarks, that Helena Fullerton actually smiled with the conviction that she certainly had the greatest "sap-head" for a cousin that ever lived.

But what was the meaning of this? A half hour had passed since Percy had swallowed the fearful drug, and he showed not the least evidence of being affected by it.

The victim was still emptying his pockets, and finally dove down into the breast pocket which had been visited so often while he was cooking the mutton.

This was pretty well filled, and he drew out several photographs and packages.

One of the latter he laid upon the ground beside him, and then picked it up and looked at it again.

"By Jove! how is that?"

It was labeled "Poison," and was securely tied up with twine, and the paper was unbroken.

Fitzsimmons held it up and stared at it in silent amazement as though he couldn't make out what it all meant.

"Why that is the package of arsenic, that Ned Hosmer brought me from Saint Paul; did you tie it up again?"

Instead of answering, Percy stared, with open eyes, and then forced his hand down in his pocket again.

This time, he fished up another package of paper, that was covered with a white powder, the paper torn, and apparently with half its original contents gone. This unquestionably was the parcel from which the powder had been taken and scattered over the meat.

Percy held it up, and as the firelight shone upon it, Helena Fullerton read:

"MINIATURE MOTHER OF PEARL.
Original and Genuine Article; Contains no Inferious Substance. Prepared only by—etc."

And then, there was the likeness of a handsome young lady in the corner of the label.

Fitzsimmons laughed till he fell over on his side, then straightened up, and as soon as he could subdue his risibles, said:

"What do you think, Helena? Instead of sprinkling the arsenic on the meat, I got the wrong package, and threw some face-powders upon it, as harmless as so much flour."

"What were you doing with the face-powder?" she asked, so greatly relieved that she felt privileged to quiz him a little.

"Well, you see, I carry it as a present to my lady friends; I hope you don't think I ever use it; I bought it, because it had the picture of such a handsome lady upon it, and, as a present to you. It generally comes in a round box, with a little red fringe around it; but I smashed it up and put it in this paper, because it was so much handier to carry. Now, ain't that a piece of good-luck though? and I have eaten enough dinner to last me a week. I wonder who got fooled—these Indians or me."

"Both, that being the case, although I don't much relish the thought of eating 'Mother of Pearl,' yet, perhaps it is the best use to which it can be put, and so I will venture upon some myself."

With this, Helena walked to the log, picked up the remainder of the meat, disengaged a portion, and began eating it.

Seeing this, one of the Indians came forward and protested against it, probably fearing that she meant suicide.

But she refused to discontinue, and ate enough to give her all the nourishment she needed, and then she seated herself upon the log, where she could face her three captors, and see the movements of all.

Their interest was centered upon Fitzsimmons, whom they expected every moment to fall on the ground in his last struggle.

But this expectation did not meet with much encouragement; for, having discovered another cigar about his person, Percy drew a brand from the fire, lit it, and then reclined upon the ground in the attitude of a man who feels himself in an exceedingly comfortable position.

"Let them watch," muttered the object of their attention, understanding very well what it meant. "I only wish I had a little more appetite left and I would eat the rest of that mutton, and compel them to go without their supper."

"Wasn't that a fortunate slip-up for me? It was a providence indeed; but I ought to have been more careful in emptying my pockets. Helena's bright eyes saw that powder, and I do believe she thinks I use it myself. Of course all we beaux do, but we don't care about the ladies knowing it; especially those that are like her, who do not need artificial assistance to heighten their charms."

It was a little annoying to feel this conviction, but the great, overpowering mistake—if so it might be termed—so outweighed every thing else, that it can not be wondered that Fitzsimmons felt so elated at times that he could barely repress a shout. He even meditated leaping to his feet, placing his hands upon his hips, and waltzing about the camp-fire, to show his prime condition.

"Then it would be a sort of homœopathic war-dance," he added, "and would teach these wretches a Christian amusement that can take place of their barbarous practices."

Fully a half-hour more passed, during which the three Sioux scarcely removed their eyes from Fitzsimmons, who continued puffing very leisurely at his cigar, so as to make it last as long as possible. Occasionally one of them glanced toward Helena Fullerton, who sat quiet and motionless, watching all.

When the time mentioned had elapsed, the Indians were convinced that no mischief had been intended by their prisoner, and that he probably meant to distribute some sort of an appetizer over the surface of the meat.

So, as they were all in need of a meal, they fell to and ate the rest of the meat themselves, without the least appearance of any suspicion of anything wrong.

This done, the savage who had heard Percy ask Helena for her pistol, now walked to where she was sitting, and pausing a step or two away, as she rose to her feet, said:

"Got little gun—gib me."

She comprehended his meaning in a moment, and she stepped away from him.

"Me want—me hab," he added, drawing his knife from his girdle and holding it aloft in the same threatening manner that he had used toward Fitzsimmons.

Helena passed her hand to her bosom, and

drew out the diminutive weapon, as if she were about to surrender it. Instead of doing that, however, she hastily drew the hammer back, and raised her arm, looking her foe full in the face.

"I shall not give up the weapon," she said, in a calm voice, "and if you come any nearer I will fire."

The Sioux, with a scornful grunt, sprang directly at her, intending to clasp her in his arms; but she leaped beyond his reach, and pausing only long enough to make sure of her aim, discharged two barrels of her revolver, in quick succession, full at his face.

CHAPTER VIII.

INTO THE RAVINE.

THE pistol of Helena Fullerton could not have been better aimed, and the first conical bullet went through the skull of the Sioux as though it was but an egg-shell, and the second followed the first in a parallel direction, and scarcely a half inch from it.

The savage was killed so quickly that he could not have known what did it. With a spasmodic gasp, and an upward fling of his brawny arms, he fell forward like a log, and his head striking at the very feet of the maiden.

The latter seeing that one foe was finished, raised her pistol again and held it ready for the other two, certain that they would attack her, in revenge for what she had done.

All this was done with such suddenness, that the remaining Sioux seemed unable to realize, for some time, what had taken place; but the double crack of the pistol and the sight of their prostrate and motionless comrade, told the story in a language that was not to be mistaken.

Knowing that the crisis was at hand, Fitzsimmons sat stupefied, knowing not what to do, and only wishing that he, too, had a pistol.

What the precise action of the Sioux would have been had they not been disturbed, can only be conjectured; but it is probable that they would have subjected the daring girl to every possible indignity, had they been able to secure possession of her person.

But before any serious attempt could be made, the double crack of two rifles was heard, and both rolled over on the ground, as dead as dead could be.

Ere the two captives could comprehend what had taken place, the crackling of the underbrush was heard, and Old Zip and Ned Hosmer rushed up to the camp-fire.

"Ah! my own, is it you?" exclaimed the overjoyed lover, rushing up to Helena, and catching her in his arms; "we have been hunting the hills for you, and, thank God, find you unharmed."

The happy girl did not swoon, but she was unable to articulate, and suffered her lover to lead her to the tree, and seat her upon it, while he held her precious head upon his shoulder, thankful, glad, joyous in his passion.

Old Zip looked around and made sure that the "varmints" were laid out so effectively that nothing was to be apprehended from them, and then he advanced to where Percy was just rising to his feet.

"How are you, Persimmons?" said he, extending his hand; "you have been striking up a trade with the varmints, have you?"

"Yes, confound them; I had to do it to keep them in good-humor, but I think I'll trade back now."

"Who popped over that critter out thar?" he asked, indicating the one lying near the tree, where the lovers were sitting.

"I suppose I ought to have the credit for that," he answered, "as I assumed the direction of affairs here, although the young lady actually pulled the trigger."

"I should think she did, for your shots are more apt to hurt harmless critters than they are them that they're intended for."

Nothing special was meant by this, but Fitzsimmons recalled his last *mesalliance*, and instantly demanded:

"Who told you about that?"

"Bout what?"

"About my shooting that cow by mistake."

"Nobody—I didn't know nothing about it. I seen the cow in the wood, and s'posed it were the work of the varmints, but I'm glad you told me of it."

"By Jove! I was a little too quick there," said Percy, with a sickly laugh. "I took the cow for a bear; and supposed you had seen me shoot—the last of us will make mistakes."

"Come, Ned," called out the hunter, addressing his young friend. "I guess the gal has revived, and we musn't forget that there are some

of the varmints still left in the woods. I think we'd better make a change of quarters."

"I am so glad you have come," said Helena, reaching out her hand to the hunter. "Ned has just told me that father and mother are both safe in your cabin, where I hope we shall soon be."

"We haven't been out hunting for you very long," said Zip; "somehow or other we drifted over this way, caught a glimpse of your camp, heard the bang of your pistol, and came up just in time to take a hand in the rumpus."

While the three stood conversing, Fitzsimmons did his best to recruit his toilet, taking from the prostrate forms his hat, watch, necktie, vest, and various articles that rightfully belonged to him. It was a sore task and a repulsive work, but he persevered, and soon placed himself in quite a presentable condition again.

He found his wearing apparel rather soiled, but he was glad to get it as it was, and recalling his recent remarkable escape, he was certainly justified in feeling that extremely good fortune had attended him.

As there was something terrible in the sight of the three inanimate forms lying near them, and Helena shuddered every time she encountered them, the party moved away, carrying the rifles with them, so that each man was doubly armed.

They walked through the woods in silence until they reached a small clearing, into which the moonlight penetrated, where they paused for a short consultation.

"As near as I can make it," said Old Zip, in answer to a question, "there are forty or fifty Injuns among these hills, and the sooner we get up into the old cabin the better it will be for all of us."

Hosmer, who had been introduced to Percy, treated him with the utmost cordiality, inquiring the particulars of his capture and how it was that he was placed in charge of three Indians, instead of remaining with the entire party.

"As soon as they surrounded me in the house," he replied, "they all set upon and disarmed me. After that they gauged my height and weight, and concluded, I suppose, that if three of their number were fully armed they would be capable of preserving themselves from injury at my hands. I trust you do not mean to insinuate, sir, that it required a smaller party than usual to hold me in durance."

"On the contrary, quite the reverse. Old Zip, here, tells me that he was once driven a hundred miles through the woods by two Indians, who together didn't weigh more than one of your jallars."

"You didn't understand him," interposed the hunter, with all solemnity; "the wonder is that after the varmints took a look at you, they didn't make up their minds that it would take the whole party to hold you, and not run such an awful risk as leaving only three of their best warriors to hold you."

"Beware, sir," said Fitzsimmons, with frigid dignity; "I am not in the helpless condition I was a few moments ago; I am armed."

"That don't make no difference, fur you're just as dangerous one way as the other."

Helena, seeing a prospect of something unpleasant, interfered, and reminded Zip that he had said that it was necessary to make all haste to the cabin, as they were in danger so long as they remained away.

"That's so," he said; "and we're standing here, making fools of ourselves. I'll take the lead, and you can follow, minding that you must keep as quiet as if tending your own funeral, fur thar's no telling when we'll run into a nest of the varmints. Ned, you'd better let the gal come next to me, and you keep a watch at the rear."

Helena stepped forward to carry out this suggestion, when Fitzsimmons thrust his elbow out, as an invitation for her to take his arm.

She smiled and replied:

"I'm afraid we can't adopt that style very well in the woods, especially in the nighttime."

"Let 'im kink out his elbows ef he wants to," said Old Zip; "and after he gets them cracked against the trees two or three times, he'll get enough of it."

Percy concluded not to press the point.

To reach the ravine in which the wonderful cabin was situated, it was necessary to ascend and pass to the other side of a mass of hills.

The walking was exceedingly rough and tiresome, and poor Fitzsimmons was tired to the utmost.

Forgetting himself, he now and then gave utterance to some exclamation, but one or two

sharp reminders from Zip sufficed to make him more careful afterward.

He had one consolation in journeying. As Ned Hosmer acted as rear-guard, he thus found himself placed between him and Helena, with whom he managed to exchange a word or two, without exciting the ire of their guide.

When they reached the summit of the hills, all paused for a few minutes' rest.

From their elevated stand-point they found their view quite extended, as the moon had reached a high point in the heavens, and it was unobscured by any passing clouds.

Away off to the northward a bright light could be seen in the sky, and apparently in the very horizon. Looking a little to the east of this, a precisely similar sight was seen.

"Both made by the varmints," was the commentary of Zip, after they had looked at them a few minutes in silence.

"I hope the inmates have been as fortunate as we," said Helena, leaning upon the arm of her lover.

"More likely every one of 'em is inside them burnin' buildings," replied Zip. "I never knowed of but one cabin in the air, and that 'ere belongs to the undersigned."

"That's quite a curiosity," said Fitzsimmons. "I passed under it to-day, and tried to learn how it is stuck up there."

"Did you find out?"

"Certainly; I always succeed in any thing I undertake, unless something intervenes to prevent."

"How is it? Don't speak too loud, for those others might hear you."

"Why, you have got the side against the rocks planed off smooth, and then you covered it with mucilage and glue, and stuck it up against their surface, and there she sticks."

"See here," said the hunter, nudging him, and speaking in a confidential whisper; "it's a great secret, and I don't want to let anybody know how the thing is done."

"Oh! that's all right," replied Percy, with a lofty air. "Of course, I understand such things; but let me ask you how it is in rainy weather. Isn't the cabin in danger of dropping off?"

"Well, yes, we have to look out for that. Two or three times it has got so wet that it slid down to the bottom, and we had to wait till next morning afore we could stick it on again."

"Isn't there any way by which you can avoid that danger?"

"Oh, yes; I have an umbrella in the house, and when it gets to raining pretty hard, Peggy holds it out the window, and that keeps it off, you see."

"That must be rather tiresome."

"So it is; but when she gets tired, why we relieve one another, and so get along first-rate. Do you understand, Persimmons?"

Percy nodded his head to signify that it was all clear to him, and that he was a man who knew how to keep a secret.

When the party had sufficiently rested, they resumed their journeying through the wood, taking the same form of march as before, but advancing with still greater caution.

Old Zip tabooed all talking, except in whispers, and admonished each one to walk with as light footsteps as possible.

In this manner they progressed, until they began descending the hill into the ravine.

This was the point of extremest danger, and the gait of Old Zip became tedious from its deliberation and care. He really believed that the chances were ten to one against the ravine being clear of the Sioux, and if he should lead his friends into an ambush the result could but be disastrous in the extreme.

In this fashion they reached a point on the edge of the gorge, where the vegetation grew luxuriantly, and where the rocks were piled in masses one above another, while a stream of icy-cold water trickled down from a point fully fifty feet above their heads.

"Here I'm going to leave you a while," said Old Zip, turning about and facing his friends.

"For what?" was the prompt query of Ned Hosmer.

"Matters look a little too dubious for me to take the whole party down thar, till I make sartin thar ain't a thousand of them sarpiants waiting to gobble us up."

"How far off is your cabin?" inquired Fitzsimmons.

"A little less than thirty miles."

"By Jove—"

"Excuse me," interrupted Zip with a laugh, "I mean about a quarter of a mile. But the only way to get at it is from below, and we have got to make it right through the ravine;

so we must make sure of our ground afore we go to tramping over it. Do you get the idea, Persimmons?"

"Very commendable forethought—very commendable," assented Percy, as though his opinion was all that was needed to decide the whole question.

"Do you wish me to accompany you?" asked Hosmer, stepping up to the side of the old hunter, laying his hand upon his shoulder, and speaking in an undertone: "for if you do, I will leave Helena here and go with you."

Old Zip looked down with a pleasant grin in the face of the young man, whose daring skill and nobility of character had completely won his affection.

"Do you s'pose I'd take you away from the gal, if I did want you? Just look back and see how she is eating you up with her eyes. No, Ned, I don't want you; stay and take good care of her, for Persimmons is smit, and is bound to rope in ahead of you if such a thing is possible."

Ned Hosmer's face expanded with the quiet smile of assurance, as he answered:

"Don't worry him; he seems to be good-hearted, and if anxious to measure lances with me, I will leave Helena to act the part of umpire."

Zip shook his head.

"I'd like to see the chap that has any show thar; why I'd doubt my own success, supposing Peggy hadn't been born."

This badinage finished, the guide now addressed himself to the party:

"I'm going to make a reconnoissance of the ravine. I s'pose Peggy is on the look-out, and unless she signals all right, you've got to stop among these rocks and bushes till she does give the right signal."

"Are you about to venture upon the expedition alone?" inquired Percy, stepping up to Zip.

"I did think of it, unless you object to it."

"I think you ought to have company, and if Mr. Hosmer here's unwilling or afraid to do so, why I will volunteer to go along with you myself."

This was a direct thrust at the lover, in the hope of inducing him to leave the ground clear for him to press his suit with his cousin Helena. Both she and Hosmer understood this, and the girl pressed his hand to signify that he was to pay no heed to it.

So our hero quietly smiled, and said nothing.

Finding the taunt had produced no effect, and feeling a little jealous, Fitzsimmons became more pointed:

"I wish to say, Mr. Hosmer, that I consider this undertaking of Zip hazardous in the extreme, and I am of the opinion that he ought to have company. Are you willing to act as his escort?"

Hosmer was not without a certain waggishness in his disposition, and he answered, in an humble voice:

"I suppose you are right, Mr. Fitzsimmons; indeed I will not take it upon myself to dispute you. Yes; the expedition is dangerous, and nothing ought to be neglected that can increase his chances of safety."

"As I learn from my dear friend Helena, there, that you are intimately acquainted with the country, I consider you as eminently the person to act as his companion. What do you think?"

"I am afraid I shall have to plead guilty; but then it will be a great deal more pleasant for me to stay here and keep company with my dear friend Helena."

It seemed as if Fitzsimmons was unable to give utterance to the noble rage that was swelling in his soul.

"From what I know of my cousin, I know that she will drive you out of her presence, if you have not the manhood to volunteer."

"Can't I stay, dearest?" asked Hosmer, turning plaintively to the lady, like a child whining for some sweetmeats.

"Yes; I am willing," was the reply, given with an apparent reluctance. "Yes; I think it will be safer for you here."

Percy was nonplussed, and did not know what to do to show his scorn for such poltroonery. While he was debating what to say or do, Old Zip focused things by starting away.

"Hold on!" he called out, in a dangerously loud voice.

"Wal, what's wanted?" asked the hunter, pausing, turning his head, but not offering to come back.

"I want to fix this matter. It's a shame—a disgrace—"

But before he could finish the sentence, Zip was beyond sight and hearing, and Fitzsimmons turned back, feeling that that game was blocked.

To add to his scorn when he looked at the couple, he saw them sitting close together billing and cooing totally unmindful of his presence, and apparently as happy as happy could be.

Percy was on his dignity now, and, folding his arms, he strode back and forth with a lofty look, as if he would shame the young man into rushing after the hunter, and throwing himself headlong into the thickest of the fight.

"I didn't think anybody could have the cheek to act that way," he growled, scowling at them sideways, "unless I was the man; I have done things that were about as thin as that. But then I had wit enough to put them in the best light possible, while he just owned up square that he was a coward—"

At this juncture Fitzsimmons heard something that sounded like a kiss, and he paused abruptly and glanced savagely at them.

"I should think that they would have more sense of propriety than that," he added, as he resumed his walk, "but there are folks in this world who don't know what's what."

And nursing his wrath he strode back and forth indignant at himself, because he could not avoid making himself utterly miserable, by surveying the happy couple. Finally he managed to give himself a grain of comfort.

"I am sure that when, to-morrow, Helena has had time to consider the character of this young man, and to compare the two, she will never countenance him again."

CHAPTER IX.

"KEEP AWAY FROM THE CABIN!"

A STRANGE presentiment of danger came over Old Zip Smith as he left his friends, and descended the ravine, which he had traversed so often on his way to the cabin in the air.

"It's blamed queer," he muttered as he advanced with all caution and circumspection, "but thar seems to be something about these yer Sioux that I don't understand. I've trapped among the Blackfeet of Oregon, and lassoed the bufflers among the Comanches of the Llano Estacado, until I thought I got the hang of their devilments, and so I did."

"But," he added, as if arguing the matter with a visible opponent, "these yer Sioux seem to have a little different style from both. It ain't clear to me why they didn't tomahawk young Persimmons when they got him, and then they used 'Lena as respectful like as though she was the medicine woman of thar tribe. The way they've sarved other settlers and women round the country, proves that the Comanches and Apaches can't beat 'em in pure cussedness. I know they take prisoners sometimes, but they ain't apt to treat 'em so well as they did these."

"Then they hain't hurt his house, so far as I can see, while they're burning every other in the neighborhood. It can't be that they think anything of Hugh, 'cause he's never had anything much to do with them. The last Sioux he spoke to was last week only, when he smashed one's nose till it looked like a split tomat', all 'cause he said something not very nice to 'Lena."

"And if he had saved twenty Indians from small-pox, measles, whooping-cough and starvation, them same twenty would be the first to turn right square around and cut his throat; that's the style of the noble red-man."

"The consequence of all this to my mind," continued Zip, pursuing a train of argument and conclusion, as though he were an advocate at the bar, "is that some of these Sioux—not all of them—are playing some trick upon us. When them varmints went to peppering my old hat, they acted natural, just genuine red-skins; but then they left very sudden, and where were they when Ned and me went down the rope?"

It would be tedious to the reader to follow the hunter through all his peculiar ratiocinations by which at length, he came to the conclusion that the Sioux were endeavoring to draw them into ambush, by disarming suspicion, and making them believe that they had withdrawn altogether.

It was more than natural that they should do this very thing, seeing that the cabin in the air was virtually impregnable; but there were other phases of this business—not necessary to be mentioned here—which wore an inexplicable look to the hunter, old and experienced as he was.

However, he concluded to leave their development to the future.

"If I can make sartin that thar's a chance to run the gal up the cabin, p'raps Persimmons

too, I'll do it—but if any thing looks shady-like, I'll keep out of this ravine, if we've got to run all the way to Saint Paul to get out the way of the varmints."

The reader will understand that although Zip's present home was not to be equaled by any similar contrivance in the world, yet the manner of reaching and leaving it, was perilous in the extreme, as a man going up and down the rope was the best target that a lurking foe could wish.

Indeed, Peggy Smith had seen three men, at different times, picked off in this manner—and once her own husband was wounded by an Indian, of whose presence on a distant rock he was well aware, and who, he did not believe, could possibly reach him while so far away. Perhaps it was a chance shot, but such as it was, the hunter came desperately near losing his life.

This couple, who were devotedly attached to each other, and who always lived in the greatest harmony, arranged a series of signals between each other, by which it was almost impossible for danger to exist undiscovered.

The elevated position of the cabin gave its occupant an extended view, while whoever was wishing to ascend the rope, first made a careful reconnoissance of the rocks upon the opposite side of the ravine.

How, then, the reader will naturally ask, when both Zip and Peggy took up their abode in some other places, as they occasionally did, was it that they managed to leave the cabin at the same time, and when once away, how did the first person manage to get up again, with the rope coiled up on the windlass, nigh a hundred feet beyond their reach?

This was a question that many a person had asked, and yet had never received a satisfactory answer to. As the hunter and wife had been together in St. Paul and in Alden, and even had spent more than one night at the house of Hugh Fullerton, there can be no question that there existed a way of performing what seemed an almost impossible feat.

Hugh himself, unable to get satisfaction from Zip, had watched nearly a whole day in the hope of discovering the mysterious means by which he bridged the chasm that to all others seemed impassable.

But neither he nor any one besides the couple themselves had learned the secret, and upon the whole, we think we will not tell it just yet, promising the reader that it shall be explained in full to them before the last page is reached.

We have said that Old Zip had arranged a system of signals with his wife, by which they could understand each other perfectly well, whether it was night or day.

And now, as he advanced stealthily along the ravine, his glance was constantly thrown upward, on the look-out for some token from his better half.

His trained eye was enabled to locate his "nest," without difficulty, although the position of the moon was such that it was thrown entire in shadow. But advancing nearer and nearer, he was soon enabled to discern its outlines.

All was of the same uniform darkness—there being no sign or appearance of any living person being within the cabin.

"But Peggy is thar," was the conviction of the hunter, and a conviction indeed that could not be shaken.

She had extinguished the lights in the structure after the departure of her friends, perhaps for the sake of greater safety—so that the darkness and stillness neither meant danger nor safety.

Zip crept forward, like a panther stealing upon his prey, not once looking up the rocks, but watching every side for his foes, whose presence he had good reason to fear.

When he was almost directly beneath the cabin, he paused, and feeling around for a small stone, threw it into the air, with such accuracy, that it struck the planking of the building with a dull thud, distinctly heard by himself.

"That'll fetch her," he concluded, stepping back in the shadow of the rocks, and watching the building alone. "I never yet had to knock at the door twice for the old woman."

Nor did he have to do so in the present instance. Scarce a minute elapsed after the striking of the stone, when the glimmer of a light was seen within the cabin in the air—and fixing his eye upon the nearest window, Zip speedily was enabled to discern the point of life itself made by the candle, through the thin covering that protected the window.

"Now, she is going to speak," concluded the hunter, as he watched the point with admiring interest.

Remaining stationary a moment, it moved

around in a circle three times, then paused for an instant, and turned backward with precisely the same motion, except that it was not steady.

"That means keep away from the cabin," muttered the hunter; "they've got to be purty sharp to shut up Peggy's eye."

If there could have been any doubt in the mind of Old Zip it was removed during the next five minutes.

Standing still in the shadow of the rocks, he heard the report of a rifle from the top of the other side of the ravine, and at the same instant the jingle of glass, and the extinguishment of the light in the cabin, told very distinctly at what target the weapon had been aimed.

"That's a piece of tomfoolery," was the comment of old Zip, "fur all that varmint has done, has been to break a pane of glass and to snuff Peggy's candle. If he had kept still, and staid out of sight, he might have got a crack at bigger game."

Such was the case beyond question, and the shot proved that the Sioux were in waiting and were holding the cabin in surveillance.

Having received such indubitable proof of the presence of the savages whom they were seeking to avoid, Old Zip saw that he had nothing to do except to return and rejoin his friends, with the assurance that the time had not yet come for them to make the entrance to their "nest" of safety.

His return through the ravine was characterized by almost as much care and stealth as his entrance; for should the hiding-place of his friends be discovered, they could annihilate them as well there as close in the vicinity of the cabin in the air.

He found matters about as he had left them. Ned Hosmer and Helena sat by themselves, so engaged and interested in each other, that they scarcely noticed him when he came among them; while "Persimmons" was still pacing back and forth, with arms folded, like some legislator absorbed in affairs of state.

He quickly explained the situation and added:

"I don't s'pose thar's very much danger in staying here till morning, but it looks to me as though we shan't be able to crawl into that cabin fur two or three days."

"It will hardly do to remain here," said Hosmer; "it seems to be a good enough place at night, but won't we be liable to discovery during the daytime, so close to the ravine, with the Indians constantly passing back and forth and hovering near us?"

"You're right, Ned," replied the hunter. "I'm going to make another reconnoissance in several hours, as I've a kind of belief that that 'ere rifle bullet was intended as a parting shot by the red-skin."

"You must be very careful that your reconnoissance is a thorough one," said Ned, "for you can understand our situation."

"Never fear for me," was the answer. "I've been in this business too long to pass for 'Persimmons'."

"In case it is impossible for us to enter the cabin to-night," said Hosmer, "do you propose for us to remain here, until such a time as it shall be safe?"

"No; if we're outside at daylight, we've got to make a change of base, and we ain't fur from the cavern."

"Ah! if that's the case, I don't see why we might not go there at once. You know you took me through it last summer, and I considered it as safe as that eagle's nest of yours."

"But it ain't, though, and you're likely at any time to get cotched there. If such a thing as a thousand Indians should come crawling in there, you couldn't keep 'em out, while ten thousand couldn't phase the cabin. Do you see the difference, Ned?"

"I won't dispute it with you," he replied, with a laugh.

As Old Zip did not propose to move away for an hour or two, and as all were pretty tired, they took seats upon the ground, in the deepest of shadow, where they could converse in quiet.

Their conversation is hardly worth the record, and it had continued but a few minutes when a new idea seemed to strike the hunter.

"We orter have a sentinel here to keep watch while the rest of us take a little rest."

"I am of that opinion," instantly replied Hosmer, "and so make yourselves comfortable, while I—"

He paused abruptly, as he felt the foot of Zip press against his.

"As you staid back yar, when I needed yer, I don't feel very much like trusting you ag'in. Persimmons is my man, so you set still, while he acts guard, till I'm ready to change places with him."

There was no possible getting out of this request, much as Percy disliked to assume the disagreeable duty.

Zip had taken him entirely off his guard; and so, making a virtue of necessity, he sprung up with great alacrity.

"Of course—of course—I am always ready to throw myself into the breach," said Percy, shouldering the heavy rifle, and, walking off some distance in the wood, he began slowly circling around the camp.

This he speedily found was the hardest part of his task, as the ground was so uneven and broken that it was a regular climbing and leaping business, while some of the bushes scratched and tore his clothes not a little.

"By Jove! I ain't going to do this," he exclaimed, as he halted in a more open spot than the ground over which he had been picking his way. "I can just as well sit here and keep watch, as to be tearing my way through the bushes in danger of stumbling over some red-skin without seeing him."

Midnight was not far away, when Percy Fitzsimmons took his position, and he felt somewhat sleepy, especially as he was quite exhausted from the unusual amount of pedestrianism in which he had indulged during the day.

"I can see," he soliloquized, after settling himself comfortably in his new position, "that that Ned Hosmer is very much afraid of me. I have made several advances, on purpose to insult and rouse him to action; but he is so lamb-like that I can not get any excuse for punching him. It is hard to kick a dog when he is cringing at your feet. But if there is a spark of manhood in him, I will rouse it to-morrow, and then after I extinguish him in the presence of Helena, she will be so disgusted with him, that he will never dare come into her presence again. Then that, too, will make the way clear for me—"

Percy Fitzsimmons, at this point, began to stammer and speak thickly, and finally paused; then his head nodded forward once or twice, and then he keeled over on his side fast asleep at his post.

CHAPTER X.

COMING AND GOING.

"PERSIMMONS" had been in position but a short time when Zip crept stealthily around him, intending to play the part of a lurking Indian. Not from any fear of personal harm, but from a wish to avoid drawing the attention of the Sioux to the spot, he had tampered with his gun so as to make it impossible to fire it.

The particular programme that Old Zip had laid out for himself was spoiled by Percy's sudden falling asleep; so that he had crept up and finally stood upright before the somnolent sentinel without drawing a single challenge from him. Retracing his steps to where he had left his companions, he informed them of the situation of affairs, and added:

"Persimmons will sleep till morning, so thar ain't any use of watching him."

With which, he plunged part way into the cavern, calling upon them to follow.

As Ned Hosmer obeyed, leading his affianced by the hand, every thing was in utter darkness, and he could only follow the voice of the hunter. The entrance was broad, but low, so that they were compelled to move in a stooping position, and proceed at quite a slow rate.

In this way they advanced something like a hundred feet, when Zip called upon them to halt.

"Stay where you are till I strike a light, or you'll get your noddles bumped."

He drew a match against the flinty walls, and then held it to the wick of a candle, which gradually diffusing its light, revealed a scene which caused an exclamation of delight from the two spectators.

The passage along which they had been making their way thus far suddenly expanded into an apartment over twenty feet in diameter and fully fifty feet in height. It was cool and pleasant, with a tiny stream of water running through one corner, and a faint bluish light in the dome showed by what means the cavern was so well ventilated.

Over one portion of this natural chamber was spread a neat rag carpet, and chairs, table, and cooking utensils showed that it had served the purpose of home to somebody at some time or other.

"What fairy scene is this?" asked Helena, as their guide held the candle over his head.

"The fairy that swings the broomstick here is just now in the cabin, keeping things straight thar."

"This then is your other home of which I have heard so much?" inquired the maiden, walking

over the carpet and looking about her with no little interest. "I am almost afraid to venture into the enchanted castle."

"Thar ain't nobody yar to disturb yer. Make yourself at home."

"Are we to remain here for the present?" inquired Hosmer.

"Ef it ain't safe to crawl into the cabin, why you'll stay here till it is. In an hour or so, I'm going to take another look up in them parts, as I've an idee that maybe we can run the blockade just now."

The three remained within the cavern for an hour or so, the proprietor explaining many curious facts about it, one of which was the manner in which he closed up the entrance against all his foes. This was done by swinging round the extraordinary balanced rock, so that the united efforts of the men from the outside were insufficient to move it.

"But it can't begin with the cabin," said he, "cause if the varmints come crawling round here, you've got to watch 'em, while in the cabin Peggy can lay down and go to sleep for a week at a time."

This expressed the difference very decidedly.

When the time had expired, Zip extinguished the candle and they groped their way out again.

"Wait here," he whispered, "while I go and take a look at Persimmons to see how he is getting along."

He was gone but a minute or two, when he returned with the information that he was nowhere to be found.

Helena's heart instantly smote her.

"It was a shame to leave him as you did, Zip, and he can not expect so fortunate an escape from the hands of the Indians again."

"It ain't the varmints that have tuk him away; he thinks we have left him, and has struck a bee-line for the cabin; that's what's the matter with Persimmons."

Hereafter it will be seen that the hunter solved the matter correctly on the impulse of the moment.

"But if he has gone on alone, is he not certain to fall into their hands?" persisted Helena, who really felt grieved at what had occurred.

"Wal, it's time he l'arned to keep out of thar hands, I should say. Howsumever, I shall follow him, and if he runs his head into any rumpus, and I've got the chance, I'll catch him by the foot and draw him out."

"And shall we wait here till you return?" asked Hosmer.

"Stay here till daylight, and if I ain't back by that time, go into the cavern and wait thar fur me."

With this understanding the parties separated, the hunter moving off in the woods, where he almost instantly vanished from view.

Leaving the lovers to themselves for a short time, it becomes necessary to follow Old Zip Smith, who speedily found it necessary to take part in some important and unexpected events.

It so happened that he entered the ravine a short distance behind Fitzsimmons, whom he discovered, just as they both came in sight of the cabin.

Instead of hailing him, Zip lingered behind to see the fun. He heard the young fellow hail those aloft, and he approached near enough to see him going up the rope.

"He's fixed, I guess," concluded the hunter, "and we shan't be bothered any more in taking care of him, and glad I am that it is so."

Zip kept his eye on him until he vanished from view, and then he suddenly discovered that another figure was going up.

This had a curious look, and he approached still closer to see whether he could tell what it meant. As he got nearer, he descried the Indians standing upon the ground beneath.

"The varmints are thar, sure enough, but what trick is Peggy trying to play?"

Convinced that this was an Indian beyond all question, who was ascending the rope, and that something was amiss, Zip determined to shoot him before he could pass through the trap-door.

His rifle was already pointed, and his finger was upon the trigger, when the shot was rendered unnecessary by the sight of the red-skin coming down the rope, with lightning-like velocity.

So he lowered his gun, hearing distinctly the snapping of the rope, which showed that it had broken and was in the hands of the Sioux.

"I'm sorry for that," he growled, as he understood the mishap; "fur I'm afeard it'll soon be all up with the cabin, fur they'll soon find some way to get one end of the rope there. Peggy hadn't a hand in that business, I'm sure. I think it must have been Hugh, and I s'pose he's purty well skeered: but I'll have to show

him the way I have of getting in the concern, when it ain't handy to git hold the end of the rope."

Just then Zip's attention [was arrested by a light in the cabin window, and he knew that it was Peggy signaling. Stooping down, so as to keep her person out of range, she held the candle directly over her head, and then moved it fully a score of times in the direction that would have been made by following the outline of the figure 8.

This singular gyration of the candle was intently watched by more than one pair of eyes, far down in that dark ravine. The owners of some wondered, others suspected, but there was one standing apart by himself who understood what it signified.

When Peggy had completed her signaling, she replaced the candle in the bottle upon the shelf, where it lit up the apartment, and then showing Fitzsimmons, who complained of being sleepy, to an upper back room, where he lay down on some robes, and bidding Hugh and his wife follow his example, she conducted them to the "front parlor," and bade them good-night.

It was a little less than half an hour after, when the quick ear of the wife heard a slight noise in the rear of the cabin.

The next moment, the head and shoulders of a man came to view and paused a moment.

"Well, Peggy."

"Well, Zip."

And husband and wife kissed as they did in the olden time, and sat down on the bench beside each other to exchange opinions, and to decide what they should do.

The consultation was long, and lasted until the light in the sky betokened the coming day, when Old Zip passed out of the apartment; there was a rattling, rustling noise for a few minutes, and Peggy Smith knew that she was alone.

Hugh and his wife now made their appearance, both smiling in a peculiar way.

"It looks to me," said the latter, "as though you have had some one here during our absence. I think I heard voices."

"Yes," replied Peggy, in the most matter-of-fact manner, "after you had gone to bed I signaled to Zip to come up, and he did so."

"What did he say of Helena?"

"She is safe as she can be."

"Why didn't he stay longer?"

"He was obliged to rejoin Ned and Helena, and I expect them all here in a couple of hours. If they do not come, then we have got to go to them."

Percy was in such sound slumber that Hugh had to get him by the foot and drag him almost "down-stairs," before he could be roused to a sense of his position. Then he yawned, stretched himself and joined them below, eating as heartily as though he had not gormandized himself so thoroughly upon the night before.

Leaving the three discussing and making ready for their departure, Peggy made a careful survey of the ravine beneath. The Sioux had left the immediate vicinity, taking, as a matter of course, the rope with them, but she discerned them several hundred yards up the ravine, grouped together, and most probably discussing the cabin in the air, and how to lift themselves to the interior.

Peggy watched them for a few minutes, and then turned again as she heard a familiar sound in the rear of the building. It attracted the notice of the others also, but ere they could conjecture what it meant, Old Zip made his appearance followed by Ned Hosmer, smiling, genial and joyous as ever.

"Come, we must leave," said Zip.

Walking directly over the trap-door, the hunter paused, facing the rear planking of the house, which was placed solid against the rocks. Then he took down plank after plank, until half a dozen were removed, when the party saw themselves facing a dark passage-way.

Looking into it, nothing but darkness was visible.

"That I suppose leads out into the open air?" inquired Hugh, as he advanced and peeped into it.

"Yes, sir; twenty feet through the dark and you'll find yourself in the open air on the outside."

"Before we leave tell me how this building is held so firmly in its place?" continued the settler.

"You can see easily enough."

So he did. The bottom of the passage-way was on a level with the floor of the cabin. Two massive beams projected out like the arms of the letter V directly beneath the floor of the structure, the floor itself being double with

planking both above and below these supports, which were so skillfully hid that their location could only be suspected from the outside, although Hugh Fullerton, and indeed all who had ever looked upon the cabin in the air, knew that, as a matter of course, some such a support as this must have been provided for it from the first.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

"WAL, I s'pose I may as well tell the whole thing," said Old Zip. "This yer contrivance was put up over a dozen years ago, when such a thing as a white man wasn't seen in these parts, unless he came to hunt and trap. Me and Jake Belgrist used to trap through these parts, and one day, when we was on t'other side the ravine, we noticed the hole in the rocks, and as we could see daylight through it, we come over to look at it.

"I was about to clear out, when Jake, who was always a feller with strange ideas, says, says he, 'Zip, what a bully place this would be to put up a house.' 'Why so?' says I. 'Cause, don't you see,' says he, 'that we could fasten it here, and the red-skin ain't born that could get at us. It would be one of the places whar we could both go to sleep at the same time without dreamin' of gittin' our har raised. We c'n get the lumber at the saw-mill down on the Mississippi whar them chaps are gettin' out the timber fer a new town.'

"Thar wasn't no use of talkin' to Jake, when his mind was made up, so we saddled our animals, took our two pack-horses, and started for the saw-mill, over a hundred miles away.

"Wal, sir, we had to make four journeys there, going the slowest kind of way, afore we got all we wanted down in the ravine thar, but we got it at last.

"That 'ar' Jake was a little the smartest chap I ever traveled with; it seemed to me that he could whittle anything out with his Jack-knife, and when we stopped, he had just the right number of planks we wanted.

"Then he rode off to one of the forts and got the spikes and nails, and we went to work. We run the two heavy beams out (and Jake had trimmed 'em off with his hatchet), and we fixed the ends in the rocks.

"Arter that Jake got the framework up, and fixed up the cabin in just the style you see it now. Afore we got it done, howsumever, we made an agreement never to enter the cabin through the passage, unless we couldn't possibly come the other way."

"What was the reason for that curious agreement?" inquired Hosmer.

"On account of Injuns. We covered up the mouth of the passage, and then put sod over it, so that any one in passing by wouldn't be in danger of findin' out the way of getting in. We couldn't use the back way very often without leaving signs behind us, and that's the reason we made the bargain."

"That necessitated one of you remaining in the building all the time?"

"No, it didn't, for we used the entrance-way a good many times, during the first year."

"What became of your companion, as I do not remember to have seen him?" asked Fullerton.

"It was queer about Jake," replied Zip, in a changed voice. "He fixed a lasso by which we could draw ourselves up, and I know it saved his hair and mine more than once. We staid there all winter, and came back the next autumn, expecting to find it burned down with blazin' arrers; but there it stood as natural as ever, and I went through the passage-way, leaving it to Jake to fix everything behind me, while I let the lasso down for him. Wal, he came up laughing and singing, and was so near that I could have reached him with my hand, and when crack went a gun from the rocks up there, and poor Jake dropped down and never spoke a word. Didn't I feel bad and mad when I see'd that?"

"Wal, I just sat in that cabin till night-time, keepin' off the varmints that was tryin' to get his skulp. The first one I keeled over was the identical imp that had shot Jake. I had three more stretch'd out afore it got dark.

"As soon as the light was gone, I slipped down for the poor fellow, and got there just as a big red-skin was creepin' up to him. Wal, we had it out with our knives and when we got through, I pick'd up Jake, and carried him off a mile in the woods, whar I buried him out of the reach of wolves and red-skins.

"That 'ere made me feel so bad that I didn't go back ag'in till a year after, when I'll be shot if there didn't s'and the old cabin yet, bristlin' all over with arrers that had been fired into it by the red-skins as was tryin' to burn it down, but couldn't come it. Me and a lot of other fellers used it fur awhile, and then when Hugh mov'd out here and put up his shanty, I fetched Peggy from St. Louis; and there ain't no need of tellin' anything more."

"No; that explains everything," said Hugh, "except the reason why you don't stay here and stand the siege as you have done so often before."

"Wal, it ain't 'cause I've got any fear of the shanty; but 'cause thar's most too many of us to make the thing comfortable. When Jake Belgrist put up the thing, he done it for me and him only, and countin' noses, I find thar's six of us, without taking into account Persimmons here, who can eat as much as all the rest together, and ain't worth his weight in shoe-pegs; so you see it won't be pleasant for all, specially as I s'pect that Persimmons thar is covered with fleas."

No pen could picture the contemptuous wrath of the subject of this insinuation; but he merely looked the "words" his tongue could not speak.

There was no excuse for remaining longer, and Old Zip led the way through the passage, as dark as it could be. All crept cautiously along in procession after him, till suddenly a "streak of light" entered the end toward which they were journeying, and Zip was seen peering carefully out of the passage-way.

"All's right!" he called out, as he suddenly emerged into the open air.

"Now wait yer," he said, to his companions; "till I go back and close up them boards, so if they git in they won't be apt to see how we got out, without considerable s'arching."

The party waited a very long time on the outside, during which they heard Old Zip, pounding and prying, as though he were toiling hard at some unusual work.

What it was, no one could conjecture, and they waited with some impatience his reappearance again.

When finally his grizzled head was thrust out of the opening, his face was seen to be covered with perspiration, as though his time had been spent in the severest kind of labor.

He made no explanations, however, and none were asked of him.

He replaced the flat stone that had just been removed, with great care, disguising its real office by covering it with the sod that had been somewhat displaced.

Everything being done, they turned their faces toward the cavern, where Helena was awaiting them, Old Zip, of course, taking the lead.

It may be said that there was not a step of the intervening distance which was taken incautiously, and no appearance of impatience could hasten their guide, whose experience among the Indians he was striving to avoid had taught him that a single giving way to impatience, if only for a moment, often destroyed the work of hours.

The forenoon was well advanced when the cavern was reached, where Helena was found, eager and anxious, and where her reunion with her parents and lover were of the most happy character.

Here Old Zip made known his intentions, which were to pilot the party to Alden, there to remain until the trouble with the Sioux should terminate.

"We won't start till dark," said he, "'cause the varmints are gettin' a little too thick. While you're waitin' yer, I'll take Ned Hosmer and show him a beautiful sight."

Fitzsimmons was glad to see the two depart, as it left him untrammelled to press his suit with his cousin Helena, whose heart, he was sure, must begin to warm to him by this time.

After leaving the cavern, Old Zip and Ned Hosmer made their way to the ravine, along which they stealthily toiled, until they reached a point quite distant from the cabin, but which commanded a full view of it.

Here they as carefully concealed themselves, the hunter saying as they did so:

"I think there'll be some fun here, afore night comes."

"From what cause?"

"The varmints are so mighty anxious to get into the cabin, that I think they'll do it."

"And what of that?"

"Wait, and you'll see."

"I think some of them are already prospecting near it."

Old Zip raised himself somewhat, so as to see more distinctly, and then observed, sure enough, that fully a dozen Sioux were assembled, apparently in consultation, beneath the cabin in the air.

"It will take considerable muscle to lasso the shanty, but that's what they're going to try to do."

Even while he spoke, the rope was seen to circle up in the air, but only to fall to the ground again, without holding.

"Is not the rope too short to hold?" asked Ned, watching the proceedings with deep interest.

"If they expect to fasten it to the roof, it is, but that ain't thar plan."

"What is it?"

"The way that rope goes, they've got a stone fastened to the end, and are aiming to throw it into the winder."

This manifestly was their plan, and it was the best under the circumstances.

Again and again the rope was seen to go upward, like a great serpent striking at some elevated foe, only to fall back again.

This was continued several minutes, when, all at once, our hero called out:

"Look! look! it holds! they have succeeded."

"You're right," asserted the hunter, "and I'm glad of it. Now, look out for fun."

What the precise character of the fun was to be, it was difficult to conjecture, but Old Zip announced its coming with such confidence that Ned Hosmer scarcely took his eyes from the spot.

Scarce a minute had elapsed, since the catching of the upper end of the rope, which left the lower end dangling some distance from the ground, when an Indian was seen to leap upward and grasp it.

Up he went, with the agility of a monkey, and holding himself suspended by the window, kicked open the door that had been left unfastened purposely by Old Zip, upon his departure from the cabin.

Then the savage leaped in, fastened the end of the rope more securely, and waited for his comrades.

Up they came one after another, swarming into

the cabin, until every member of the Sioux party had managed to insinuate himself within.

"That beats everything!" exclaimed Hosmer, whose interest in the performances of the Sioux increased from the first.

"Yes," replied Zip; "they're piled in there 'bout as thick as the shanty can stan'."

"Hark! they are shouting within the cabin."

"Yes; they have managed to find room enough to get up a war-dance."

"Merciful heavens! look!"

As the exclamation escaped Ned Hosmer, the cabin in the air was seen to topple, and then fall crashing to the bottom of the ravine, the thunderous report coming to the ears of the spectators, simultaneous with the shrieks of the victims.

't was a fearful sight but the Sioux, by their revolting excesses and outrages upon the settlers, merited their doom.

This was what Old Zip had carefully arranged for on leaving the cabin with his friends, and about whose success he had begun to entertain some doubt, until the whooping, dancing red-skins precipitated their own doom.

"It is fearful," exclaimed Ned Hosmer, shuddering at the sight.

"Yes; I think them varmints, considered as varmints, ain't of much account. Come, the circus is over, and we may as well leave."

Repairing to the cavern, Ned Hosmer related what had occurred, and by the sight of which he was so shocked that he could scarcely partake of a mouthful of the lunch that Peggy had prepared in their absence.

The party kept close within their retreat during the entire afternoon, the only one venturing out being Old Zip, who reported that there was a large party of Sioux in the neighborhood, many of whom were new-comers of the most ferocious character.

Believing that the whites had outwitted them, they had visited the house of Hugh Fullerton, and burned it to the ground. The barn was also in flames, and all the live stock, horses, cattle, pigs and fowls had been slaughtered, so that it could well be said of them that the Indians had thoroughly "cleaned them out."

"Thank God that our lives have been spared!" was the Christian-like exclamation of the father, as he pressed his wife and daughter to his heart. "I am young and healthy, and can begin life over again."

Fitzsimmons was somewhat relieved to find the cows were out of the way, as his uncle could know nothing of his exploits in that line, provided Zip Smith did not "peach" on him, and the only hope he dared hold that he would not do so, was based entirely upon the forgetfulness of the hunter.

When darkness had fairly settled over field and wood, the party of whites silently emerged from the cavern, under the leadership of Zip, the hunter, who carefully avoided approaching the house or highway, but made his way across fields, and through forests, advancing with such care and stealth that when they finally came upon the road, it was near midnight.

They were several miles from Alden, and until safely there, they could not be considered as safe at all against the marauding Indians, who were scouring the country in every direction in quest of victims.

Before daylight the village was reached, and then for the first time our friends felt safe.

Here they found friends and shelter, and here they decided to remain till all danger should pass.

Old Zip made his headquarters here, while he employed himself in errands of mercy through the surrounding country, assisting the settlers to flee from the tempest of death that was sweeping over the land.

As soon as Fitzsimmons could find means of leaving Alden, without danger, he did so, thoroughly disgusted with Minnesota, and the unappreciative nature of its inhabitants. In answer to his direct proposal to Helena, and his repeated demands that she should "weigh" him against Ned Hosmer, she was compelled to say that she had done so, and found it like balancing thistle-down against solid gold.

Then he left.

Ned Hosmer remained a few weeks at the settlement, and when he departed for his home persuaded Helena to accompany him, where, at last accounts, they were living as man and wife, as happily as a couple of humming birds.

Peace came to devastated Minnesota after a while, and the Fullertons returned to their land, and began their labors over, to find after a few years that their land had so appreciated in value that they were placed in far more comfortable circumstances than they had ever dared to hope.

Old Zip still maintains his nomadic life, making his home principally with Hugh Fullerton, who, with his wife, feels that they can never do too much to make the couple welcome and comfortable; for under heaven, they acknowledge that the lives of themselves, and of their darling child, are due to Zip.

The latter quite occasionally makes a trip down to St. Paul, where he finds from Ned Hosmer and his wife a welcome no less sincere, and where he frequently spends days of happiness, in relating his memorable experiences during the Minnesota massacre of 1861-62.

THE END.

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